

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN
LIBRARY



Reg. No. 625 Vol. I

Clas. No. VIII - B



Viceregal Library.

Date _____

THE
RIFLE
BRIGADE

1914-1918



Arthur D. S. —
Col: in Chief —

THE HISTORY OF THE RIFLE BRIGADE IN THE WAR OF 1914-1918

WITH A FOREWORD BY
FIELD-MARSHAL H.R.H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT, K.G., ETC., COLONEL-IN-CHIEF



BY
REGINALD BERKELEY, M.C.
(*Captain R. of O., The Rifle Brigade*)

VOL. I
AUGUST 1914—DECEMBER 1916

1927
LONDON
THE RIFLE BRIGADE CLUB LTD
71 ECCLESTON SQUARE, S.W.

All Rights Reserved

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THOSE WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS IT
RECORDS—THE RIFLEMEN WHO FOUGHT IN THE WAR ; AND TO
THOSE FOR WHOM IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN—THE RIFLEMEN OF
THE FUTURE

FOREWORD

By

FIELD-MARSHAL H.R.H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT AND STRATHEARN, K.G., K.T., K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., G.B.E., V.D.

THIS History has been written to put on record the part played in the Great War of 1914-18 by The Rifle Brigade—already famous for its exploits on almost every battlefield in which British troops have been engaged during the last one hundred and twenty-five years.

As a Regiment, The Rifle Brigade has always endeavoured to live up to the great compliment paid to it in 1828 by His Royal Highness The Duke of Clarence, afterwards King William IV, in his famous speech at the conclusion of his inspection of the *Dépôt* Companies of the 1st and 2nd Battalions—

“ And what more can I say to you, Riflemen, that wherever there has been fighting there you have been employed, and wherever you have been employed you have distinguished yourselves.”

How worthily the Regiment played its part in the Great War is told in this History. From four Regular and two Special Reserve Battalions it grew to sixteen Battalions: and the magnificent way in which these new Battalions acquitted themselves cannot be better expressed than in the words of the author, “ And there were forming . . . ten Service Battalions who were destined to show themselves by their achievements to be not unworthy of the highest traditions of the Regiment to which they belonged.”

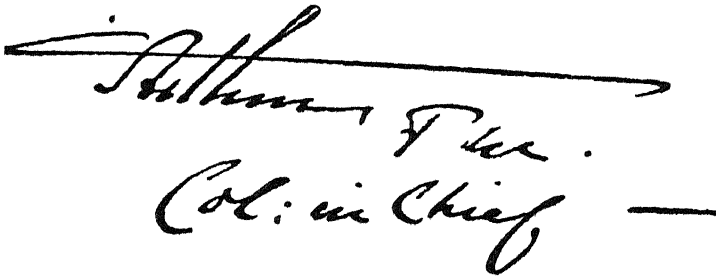
The casualties of The Rifle Brigade tell their own tale: eleven thousand five hundred and seventy-five Riflemen of all ranks gave their lives.

The pages of this History contain many accounts of individual gallantry and leadership; whilst through all the actions in which the Regiment took

part can be seen emerging those special characteristics of which all Riflemen are so proud—discipline, initiative and unfailing good humour.

This History will appeal alike to the relatives of those whose names are written on the Roll of Honour, to past Riflemen and to all connected with the Regiment, and to the Riflemen who themselves fought in the War. Finally, the deeds therein recorded will, I feel sure, serve as a guide in all soldierly qualities to the future generation of Riflemen in whom the traditions of the Regiment will live.

I write the above with the utmost pride in the achievements of the Regiment of which I have been for forty-six years Colonel-in-Chief, and in which I had the honour of serving as Lieutenant, Captain, and in Command of the 1st Battalion.



Arthur F. W.
Col: in Chief —

26TH OCTOBER, 1926.

The author desires to make his grateful acknowledgments to all those who have provided material for this volume and to the officers who have read through and checked the narrative.

He is, moreover, especially indebted to Brigadier-General J. E. Edmonds, C.B., C.M.G., Head of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, for much advice and many kindnesses ; and to Mr. K. R. Wilson, who has given invaluable help in seeing the book through the Press and generally performing the functions that normally devolve on a publisher.

R. B.

GREAT MARLOW,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

CONTENTS

1914

CHAPTER I

PEACE FOOTING TO LE CATEAU

	PAGE
Peace Footing. Embarkation of the First Battalion. The General Situation. The First Battalion reaches the Forward Area. Le Cateau.	
The First Battalion in Action	I

CHAPTER II

THE RETREAT. THE AISNE, AND THE MOVE NORTH

The Retreat from Mons. The Advance of the First Battalion to The Aisne. The Passage of The Aisne. The Third Battalion arrives in France. "The Race for the Sea." First and Third Battalions to Hazebrouck. Attack of the Third Battalion on Hill 40. The First and Third Battalions Skirmishing. The Third Battalion attacks Perenchies. Minor Operations. The Second Battalion ordered to the Front. The Second Battalion in Laventie Sector. Ploegsteert, Attack on German House by the First Battalion. Arrival of the Fourth Battalion	18
--	----

1915

CHAPTER III

NEUVE CHAPELLE AND ST. ELOI

The four Battalions in Trench Warfare. A Regimental Bereavement, Brigadier-General J. E. Gough, V.C., C.M.G., killed in action. Neuve Chapelle. The Second Battalion in Action. Lost Opportunities. The Second Battalion resumes the Attack. St. Eloi, the Fourth Battalion in a Night Attack	48
---	----

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES. FROMELLES

	PAGE
The First Gas Attack. The Fourth Battalion. The First Battalion involved. The Fourth Battalion at Bellewaarde. The First Battalion at Mousetrap Farm. Preparations for Fromelles. Attack by the Second Battalion on Rouges Bancs. The Counter-attack . . .	70

CHAPTER V

THE SERVICE BATTALIONS. BOESINGHE. HOOGE. LOOS.

The Light Divisions. Boesinghe, The First Battalion Attack on International Trench. Arrival of the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions. Hooge, the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions in Action. The Fate of the Eighth Battalion. The Third Battalion. The Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions at Laventie. Operations subsidiary to Loos. The Twelfth Battalion Attack at Piètre. The Second Battalion Attack at Bois Grenier. The Ninth Battalion at Bellewaarde Farm. Location of Battalions during the Winter . . .	107
--	-----

1915-1916

CHAPTER VI

THE SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE ALLIED OFFENSIVE
A SECOND BATTALION RAID

Movements of Battalions. The Third Battalion attacked at Hooge. The Twelfth Battalion attacked at Boesinghe. Verdun and its Consequences. Preparations for Battle. A Second Battalion Raid. The Somme, Sir Douglas Haig's Plan . . .	142
--	-----

1916

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME, FIRST PHASE
SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS ELSEWHERE ON THE FRONT

First and Second Battalions, Preparations. The Attack of the First Battalion on Redan Ridge. Operations South of The Ancre. Piecemeal Attacks. The Third Battalion at Guillemont. Preparations for the Battle of Guillemont. The First Battalion at Ypres. The Sixteenth Battalion raids "The Pope's Nose" . . .	158
--	-----

CONTENTS

xiii

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME. GUILLEMONT. FLERS-COURCELETTE

	PAGE
The Tenth and Eleventh Battalions Attack Guillemont. The Twelfth Battalion. Flers-Courcelette, the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions. A Fiasco	183

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME. MORVAL. THE TRANSLOY RIDGE

Breaking through the Defence. Gueudecourt, the Twelfth Battalion at Rainbow Trench. The Second Battalion Attack on Zenith and Eclipse Trenches. The First Battalion returns to The Somme. Attacks on Le Transloy. Frosty Trench. The First and Second Battalions Attack	211
---	-----

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE

THE FOURTH BATTALION AT SALONIKA. WINTER QUARTERS

The Attack of the Thirteenth Battalion at The Ancre. The Fourth Battalion. The Winter Campaign. The Fifth and Sixth Reserve Battalions. The Part played by the Regiment in the Battle of The Somme. Location of Battalions at the end of the Year . . .	229
---	-----

PLATES

	TO FACE PAGE
H.R.H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT—COLONEL-IN-CHIEF	<i>Frontispiece</i>
1ST BATTALION IN PLOEGSTEERT WOOD, 1914	I
1ST BATTALION IN THE TRENCHES AT PLOEGSTEERT, 1914	40
GERMAN HOUSE AND RIFLE HOUSE	44
2ND BATTALION AT FAUQUISSART CROSS ROADS, 1914-1915	52
CORPORAL C. R. NOBLE, V.C.	62
OFFICERS, 2ND BATTALION, APRIL 1915	98
MAJOR W. LA T. CONGREVE, V.C., D.S.O., M.C.	110
SECOND-LIEUTENANT S. C. WOODROFFE, V.C.	126
CORPORAL A. DRAKE, V.C.	140
"C" COMPANY, 2ND BATTALION AT LAVENTIE	182
CAPTAIN H. DANIELS, V.C., M.C.	228

MAPS

	PAGE
THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU (1ST BN.), 26TH AUGUST, 1914	15
THE RETREAT FROM MONS, AND THE ADVANCE TO THE AISNE (1ST AND 3RD BNS.), AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1914	23
THE BATTLE OF ARMENTIÈRES (3RD BN.), 18TH OCTOBER, 1914	34
THE BRITISH ADVANCE (1ST AND 3RD BNS.), 12TH-18TH OCTOBER, 1914	36
PLOEGSTEERT WOOD (1ST BN.), 19TH DECEMBER, 1914	43
THE BATTLE OF NEUVE CHAPELLE (2ND BN.), 10TH MARCH, 1915	57
ST. ELOI (4TH BN.), 15TH MARCH, 1915	67
THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES (1ST AND 4TH BNS.), 22ND APRIL-25TH MAY, 1915	79
THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES (1ST BN.), 25TH APRIL-3RD MAY, 1915	85
THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES (4TH BN.), 8TH MAY, 1915	89
THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES (2ND BN.), 9TH MAY, 1915	101
BOESINGHE (1ST BN.), 6TH JULY, 1915	117
HOOGHE (7TH, 8TH AND 9TH BNS.), 30TH JULY, 1915	125
THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME (1ST BN.), 1ST JULY, 1916	167
THE CAPTURE OF GUILLEMONT STATION (3RD BN.), 18TH AUGUST, 1916	175
THE BATTLE OF GUILLEMONT (10TH AND 11TH BNS.), 3RD SEPTEMBER, 1916	189
THE BATTLE OF FLERS-COURCELETTE (7TH, 8TH AND 9TH BNS.), 15TH SEPTEMBER, 1916	201
GUEUDECOURT (2ND AND 12TH BNS.), 7TH AND 23RD OCTOBER, 1916	217
THE ATTACKS ON LE TRANSLOY (1ST BN.), 18TH-19TH AND 23RD OCTOBER, 1916	223
THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE (13TH BN.), 14TH NOVEMBER, 1916	235
THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME AND ANCRE, 1ST JULY-30TH NOVEMBER, 1916	244
THE PART PLAYED BY THE REGIMENT IN THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME, JULY-NOVEMBER, 1916	244



1st BATTALION IN PLOEGSTEERT WOOD.

1914.

THE RIFLE BRIGADE IN THE WAR OF 1914-1918

CHAPTER I

1914

PEACE FOOTING TO LE CATEAU.

THE outbreak of the Great War found the four Regular Battalions of the Rifle Brigade, in accordance with the routine of the Cardwell System, equally distributed between the United Kingdom and Foreign Stations.

The First Battalion (Lieut.-Col. H. M. Biddulph), one of the twelve infantry units of the 4th Division (Eastern Command), was in barracks at Colchester deriving some small addition to the mild excitement of peace-time soldiering from the prospect of a spell of service overseas in the coming September. The Second Battalion (Lieut.-Col. R. B. Stephens) at the fag-end of a seventeen years' spell of foreign service, that had included the Soudan and South African Campaigns, was in India encamped at Kuldana in the Murree Hills counting the days till October 29th, when it was under orders to sail for England. Many of the officers were already at home on leave. The Battalion, thanks to hard training earlier in the year and to its well-known athletic prowess, was in magnificent fettle. The Third Battalion (Lieut.-Col. R. Alexander), in the 17th Infantry Brigade, 6th Division, was stationed at Cork in Ireland where all eyes, at that moment, were apprehensively turning from the Curragh to Belfast and back again. The Fourth Battalion (Brevet Col. G. H. Thesiger, C.B., C.M.G.), having completed ten years of its tour of foreign service, was at Dagshai near the Northern Frontier of India. There were in addition two Battalions (Fifth and Sixth) of Special Reserve, which were in reality little more than cadre formations for the supply of reinforcements in time of war. The war station of the Fifth Battalion (Lieut.-Col. F. G. Talbot, D.S.O.) was Minster-on-Sea; that of the Sixth Battalion (Lieut.-Col. E. A. F. Dawson) was Sheerness—both on the Island of Sheppey in the Thames Estuary.

The infantry of the 4th Division (Maj.-Gen. T. D'O. Snow, C.B.) was at that date distributed with a Brigade at Shorncliffe, a Brigade at Colchester, and a Brigade at Dover. The 11th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-Gen. A. G. Hunter-Weston, C.B., D.S.O.) at Colchester, comprised the 1st Bn. Somerset Light Infantry, 1st Bn. East Lancashire Regt., 1st Bn. Hampshire Regt., and the First Battalion Rifle Brigade.

The order to mobilize, sent out from the War Office on August 4th, reached the Division at 6.26 p.m. and was at once passed on to subordinate commanders. "Precautionary Period" orders, however, had been in operation since July 30th. In obedience to these, the First Battalion had already dispatched detachments to various places on the East Coast. The Harwich detachment (Captain G. E. W. Lane) provided the guard of honour for the departing German Ambassador. There was a certain difficulty in fitting the Reservists with boots. The regulation issue proved unsuitable and it was found necessary to ransack Colchester for civilian footwear, which was waterproofed by soaking in oil. Moreover the Battalion was short of officers. Nevertheless by August 8th mobilization was complete; and from that date until the 17th of the month the time was devoted to intensive training in barracks at Colchester.*

Normally the 4th Division would have formed part of the Expeditionary Force; but, in view of the possibility of an attempted landing on the East Coast, it was ordered to yield up its place to the 5th Division; and on August 7th was directed to rearrange its dispositions, by despatching

* The following account, contributed by an officer of the Regiment, gives an amusing picture of the rush of the Reservists to the Colours:—

"The Army Reserve was called out on August 2nd, but a very considerable number of Reservists had already joined up when the order was issued.

"The Depot scheme for mobilization allowed for an influx of eight hundred men on the first day, but, as a matter of fact, so great was the rush of men to rejoin that by the evening of August 5th over three thousand had reported, including nearly the whole of the Special Reserve. To accommodate all these men in the Rifle Depot itself was impossible and large numbers spent the night in churches, school and college buildings, and many even slept in the streets. To add to their discomfort it had started to rain hard early in the afternoon and continued to do so until late in the evening.

"The next day the rush of rejoining Reservists continued and, in order to make room to deal with the equipping and clothing, batches of five hundred at a time had to be marched to the Depot football ground to be out of the way until they were needed. The feeding was of course a great difficulty, but the Depot staff, under the able management of Captain and Quartermaster Judge of the 60th, managed to give every man something to eat and drink.

"The cheerfulness and spirit of the men were wonderful under the most trying conditions: their one idea being to get to their Regiment. Numbers who were time-expired offered themselves and begged to be allowed to rejoin, and a number of University undergraduates—mostly Blues—reported to offer themselves as officers. All the latter were subsequently gazetted to the Fifth and Sixth Battalions and, without exception, proved themselves very fine officers. At the time though they caused considerable alarm to the Reserve officers at the Hotel by asking ceaseless questions and devouring a large amount of the limited supply of available food!

"The Fifth and Sixth Battalions proceeded to their war stations on August 8th and took over the defence of Sheppey from the Kent Territorials."

the 12th Brigade to Cromer and the 10th to York and Edinburgh. On August 10th Divisional Headquarters were opened at Bury St. Edmunds, where General Snow assumed command between the Blackwater River and the Wash. By August 17th, however, Special Reserve, Yeomanry and Territorial Force units were available to relieve the Regular troops on the coast defences; and on the following day, the 18th, took place a pre-concerted concentration of the Division at Harrow, where the First Battalion were encamped on the Harrow School playing fields.

During the ensuing three days of preparation for embarkation and entrainment, the fighting troops found an opportunity for further training. On August 21st the movement began. On August 22nd the First Battalion—strength twenty-four officers and nine hundred and sixty-four other ranks—entrained for Southampton before daybreak, embarked with the Hampshires and Divisional Headquarters in the S.S. “Cestrian” at 10 a.m., sailed just after midday and, by 4 a.m. on the 23rd, had disembarked at Havre and was marching to No. 3 Camp on the heights above the town. The Regiment owes a debt of gratitude to the French Boy Scouts who acted as guides from the quays to the camp, constituted themselves unofficial interpreters, and even undertook the duties of assistant caterers to the officers’ mess.

The composition of the Battalion on the date of embarkation was as under * :—

Lieut.-Col. H. M. Biddulph—Commanding.

Major S. H. Rickman—Second-in-Command.

“ A ” Company.

Captain F. H. Nugent.

Captain R. P. A. de Moleyns.

Captain H. L. Riley.

2nd-Lieut. R. D. Baird.

“ C ” Company.

Major G. N. Salmon.

Captain G. J. Brownlow.

Lieut. E. S. B. Williams.

Lieut. W. Bowle-Evans.

Lieut. G. V. Campbell.

“ B ” Company.

Captain Hon. F. R. D. Prittie.

Captain O. Sutton-Nelthorpe.

2nd-Lieut. O. B. Graham.

“ I ” Company.

Captain G. E. W. Lane.

Captain Hon. R. G. G. Morgan-Grenville (Master of Kinloss).

Lieut. J. T. Coryton.

Lieut. E. W. S. Foljambe.

2nd-Lieut. G. T. Cartland (Orderly Officer to Brigadier).

* The First Battalion was appropriately the first unit of the Regiment to proceed to the theatre of war. It has therefore been thought proper to set out its composition in the text—a course prohibited by considerations of space in the case of subsequent Battalions.

Adjutant—Captain G. W. Liddell.
Quartermaster—Hon.-Lieut. G. Mitchell.
Machine Gun Officer—Lieut. J. Micklem.
Transport Officer—2nd-Lieut. G. W. Barclay.
Brigade Machine-Gun Officer—Captain D. Ovey.

At about noon next day, August 24th, escorted to the station by crowds of cheering civilians, the Rifle Brigade entrained at Havre and proceeded "in the longest train that any of us had ever seen—and the slowest" * to an uncommunicated destination. News from the front there was none, good or bad. The local papers recorded nothing but the rumoured destruction of a Zeppelin—subsequently disproved.

**The General
Situation.**

Before relating the circumstances of the arrival in the forward area, it is necessary to give a hurried sketch of what had been taking place at the front whilst the 4th Division was guarding the East Coast until home defence units could be collected to relieve it.

The British Expeditionary Force, under the command of Sir John French, consisted, in addition to the Royal Flying Corps and certain Lines of Communication troops, of one cavalry Division (Maj.-Gen. E. H. H. Allenby), and two Army Corps each of two infantry Divisions. The I Corps (Lieut.-Gen. Sir Douglas Haig) was composed of the 1st and 2nd Divisions (Maj.-Gen's. S. H. Lomax and C. C. Monro). The II Corps, originally commanded by Lieut.-Gen. Sir J. M. Grierson, who died on the journey, was by then under Gen. Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, and was composed of the 3rd and 5th Divisions (Maj.-Gen's. Hubert Hamilton and Sir Charles Fergusson).

This Force, with certain additions which, however, make no vital difference to its general composition, was concentrated by August 17th between Maubeuge and Le Cateau, with the cavalry at the north-eastern end of the area ready to gain touch with the French Fifth Army. On August 20th just as the German troops were entering Brussels and approaching Namur, and the Belgian Army was falling back into Antwerp, General Joffre decided upon a combined advance, in which the British were to co-operate on the left of the French Fifth Army, striking via Soignies in the direction of Nivelles. In pursuance of this plan Sir John French issued an order—the prelude, could he but have known, to the Battle of Mons—the effect of which was that by August 23rd the British Army would occupy the line Estinne-au-Mont—Lens, that is to say, a line a mile or so in front of the

* It carried the whole Battalion and its entire transport !

town of Mons, running roughly from north-west to south-east and about fifteen miles in length.*

It so happened that the German plan was almost exactly the converse of that of Sir John French. The strategic objective of the Army of Von Kluck (in accordance with the famous Schlieffen plan) was to envelop the left flank of the Allied Forces; and his right Corps Commander was hastening to carry this plan into effect. This inevitably spelt a collision with the British near Mons. On the 21st the troops, advancing to carry out their orders, found that the enemy was moving to meet them. At dawn on the 22nd an officer's patrol sent out by the 4th Dragoon Guards exchanged shots with a German patrol just north of the Mons-Condé Canal; and by 10 o'clock the British cavalry was engaged at Binche, at the other end of the line. Everything pointed to the presence of large German forces—a supposition confirmed by the Flying Corps reconnaissances which also gave startling accounts of the progress of the enemy on the front of the French, verified by the liaison officer with the French Fifth Army Commander. At a conference held that night at G.H.Q. Sir John French, therefore, decided to cancel the intended British offensive; but, in order to protect the flank of the French, he undertook to stand for twenty-four hours on the Mons-Condé Canal—the position which his troops had then reached.

On Sunday the 23rd, when the First Battalion, with the 4th Division, was preparing to entrain at Havre, the first British battle in the War began to be fought. By nightfall the British had fallen back from Mons, where there had been an ugly salient; and by the dawn on the 24th the Army, with the I Corps on the right and the II Corps on the left, was holding a line facing east of north about three miles south of the town. In conformity with the movements of the French on his right Sir John French, having covered the left of our Ally, now gave orders for an eight-mile retreat to a previously reconnoitred east-and-west line from La Longueville (west and a little to the north of Maubeuge) through Bavai and four miles beyond. To this position the British accordingly fell back, harassed on the II Corps front by a heavy local attack at Frameries, in which the British troops engaged more than held their own, and by a flank guard action at Elouges. Hitherto the only enemy that showed any sign of achieving the mastery over the British Army was bodily fatigue. Most of the units had been continuously on the move, fighting, entrenching, marching since dawn of the 21st. "Many a man," says the official historian, "had been for over twenty-four hours without sleep or food." So ended August 24th.

The orders for the 25th, issued after the Commander-in-Chief had been

* In order to follow the movements of the B.E.F. in the early days of the war the reader is advised to refer to the maps in Volume I. of *The Official History*.

informed of the further retreat of the French, directed the British Army to fall back some fifteen miles to the neighbourhood of Le Cateau. The configuration of the country, divided as it is by the massif of the Mormal Forest, now necessitated the splitting of the British Force into two bodies. The I Corps, with the 5th Cavalry Brigade attached, proceeded to the east of the forest, via Pont-sur-Sambre, Maroilles and Landrecies : the II Corps and the Cavalry Division, marched by the western route. To give additional security on the left flank, where the danger seemed greatest, Sir John French decided to place the 4th Division on the high ground in the vicinity of Solesmes to cover the assembly of the II Corps on the Le Cateau position. He directed the Divisional Commander, when the II Corps troops had passed through, to follow them in and place himself on the left of the line. It was the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to withdraw his whole Force on the following day a further ten to fifteen miles to the line Busigny—Beaurevoir—Le Catelet—conforming to the movements of General Joffre, who was falling back to the line Laon—La Fère—St. Quentin, with a view to resuming the offensive when he was established there. The movements of the I Corps, with the engagements of Maroilles and Landrecies, have no place in this narrative. It suffices to say that Sir Douglas Haig's troops were in a position to carry out Sir John French's plans on the 26th, had that been possible when the time came. But difficulties on the II Corps front were about to make it impossible.

On the 24th the 4th Division arrived in the theatre of war. The 11th Brigade (less the Hampshires and the Riflemen) on detraining at Le Cateau received orders to march to Troisvilles, four miles to the west, ready to move at short notice. The 10th Brigade was to be at Beaumont and the 12th at Ligny-en-Cambrésis and Montigny. In the evening the Somerset Light Infantry (11th Brigade) were ordered to reconnoitre the road from Troisvilles via Neuville to Bellevue, just east of Briastre on the Neuville—Solesmes road : and the remainder of the Brigade was ordered by General Snow personally to move to Briastre and to be in position there by 4.30 a.m. on the 25th. It had been intended that the Hampshires and the First Battalion on arrival should join the 11th Brigade at Troisvilles, but orders were now amended to provide for those units proceeding via Neuville and joining it south of Solesmes. At the same time the 10th Brigade was sent to St. Python, and the 12th to Viesly, while Divisional Headquarters moved forward to Briastre church.

At 5.30 a.m. on the 25th, the First Battalion reached the forward area. The train which had rumbled along throughout the night suddenly pulled up. The men put out their heads through the windows ; and they saw the name

Le Cateau. It conveyed nothing. An anxious Staff officer hurried up to Colonel Biddulph and gave orders to him which were then taken down by dim candlelight. In the bustle of detrainment there was nevertheless time to gain a hazy idea of the general situation. It began to seem that things were not going well at the front. "The station was full of bustle owing to the packing-up and retirement of G.H.Q. Not a cheery greeting!" When they were clear of the station the map boxes were hurriedly unpacked and the maps issued. It was a foretaste of many similar surprises in the future to discover that the contents of the boxes consisted almost exclusively of maps of Belgium!

Marching through the town "A" Company (Captain F. H. Nugent) passed Brig.-Gen. Henry Wilson,* C.B., D.S.O., Deputy Chief-of-Staff to Sir John French. He had just come from the neighbourhood of Mons; but he looked "as cheerful as ever," and called out a greeting as the company went by. After the gloom and apprehension in Le Cateau station such an encounter was a tonic to the men. The Battalion proceeded via Neuville to Briastre, where it rejoined the 11th Brigade. The march had been hot and tiring but there was no time for rest. Two companies were at once set to work digging-in north of the village, in touch with the Somersets on their left at the Fontaine au Tertre, an eminence to the east of the farm of that name, while Battalion Headquarters and the remaining two companies remained in a farmhouse by the light railway at the road-fork at the northern end of the village. During the march from Le Cateau and, in defiance, had they but known it, of an order issued from G.H.Q. at 8.10 a.m. on that very morning, they had engaged an enemy aeroplane with their rifles—the first shots to be fired by the Regiment. It is a curious instance of the unexpected drama of events that the First Battalion should have marched into its first action in the Great War on the Regimental Birthday and that on the same day the Second Battalion should have received its orders to leave India for the front.

During the night General Snow had selected the position upon which he intended to fall back when his work was done—a line running from Caudry via Cattenières, Wambaix and Seranvillers to the railway north of Rumilly—with Divisional H.Q. at Esnes Chateau ("This line," he reported to G.H.Q., "is very strong") He only waited now to be told by General Allenby that the cavalry and the 19th Brigade (which was under the cavalry commander) had no further need of the 4th Division. The day

* Formerly of the Regiment. He was destined to end the war as Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and to perish three years later by the bullet of an Irish assassin.

went quietly enough, the steady retirement of the troops of the 3rd Division through the 11th Brigade's position and the distant sound of guns being the only evidence of war, other than the tragic flow of the civil population with their few movable possessions heaped upon any available vehicles, and an occasional detachment of French infantry that strayed across the British front. But the evidence in all conscience was grim enough. The appearance of the 3rd Division troops told eloquently of what they had been through. The new-comers suddenly realized that they were on the threshold of such experiences as no one had ever before encountered. The few words snatched with friends in other units as they passed gave an idea of the potentialities of the German artillery. And it seemed that the preconceived ideas of trench construction were in need of revision. One party in particular made an unforgettable impression upon an officer of the Rifle Brigade. It consisted of a Lieutenant-Colonel, a dazed subaltern and some two hundred men. "Do you see this party?" said their leader grimly, "that's all that's left of my battalion." The speaker was Colonel Hull*; the battalion was the 4th Middlesex Regt. that had given so splendid an account of itself at Mons.

All through the day at intervals the tired troops trudged wearily past, until it began to seem that the retreat would never end. By 4.30 p.m. the Divisional Commander was growing anxious. "The situation," he wrote to G.H.Q. "is becoming serious; it is getting dark. I cannot leave here until the 19th Brigade and the rearguard of the 3rd Division are in, and cannot" (this was the most serious part of the message) "therefore cover left flank yet." He asked for definite instructions as to whether he should stand his ground or move to Wambaix. At 5.45 p.m. G.H.Q. reported the 19th Brigade to be near Solesmes and moving on Le Cateau, and that the cavalry was south of the line Solesmes—Beaurain. By 6.10 p.m. General Snow was reassured as to the movements both of the 19th Brigade and also of the 7th Brigade, the rearguard of the 3rd Division. As soon as they should pass through his (the 4th Division) rearguard he would withdraw to the Caudry line, "ready to carry out any movement that is ordered." By now the 4th Division outposts had been engaged "with what is apparently some hostile cavalry"; and there had been some long distance and ill-aimed shelling in the neighbourhood of one of the forward companies of the First Battalion.

Shortly after 6 p.m. therefore General Snow issued orders which anticipated that the last of the retreating troops would be through within the hour and directed first the 12th Brigade then the 11th Brigade and lastly, as a rearguard, the 10th Brigade and the 32nd F.A. Brigade to move off,

* He later commanded the 56th Division.

as soon as the tail of the 3rd Division should be clear. Under the Operation Order as amended at 6.55 p.m.* the 11th Brigade front in the new line was to extend from Fontaine-au-Pire (inclusive) to the railway station between that village and Wambaix. Somewhere between 8.20 p.m. (the time given in the First Battalion Diary) and 11 p.m. (that given by the 11th Brigade) the troops were on the march to the rear positions. The difficulty in ascertaining the exact time is accounted for by the fact that the move-off was delayed both by the necessity of calling in the advanced companies and moving to the Brigade rendezvous, and by the transport of the 3rd Division which had become almost inextricably confused in Viesly, through which village lay the route of the Battalion. Moreover, in consequence of a report that the South Lancashire Regiment was in difficulties about two miles north of Solesmes, it was necessary to despatch two platoons to its assistance. These platoons after struggling for some distance through the press of transport were met by a staff officer who contradicted the report and sent them back to the Battalion which they rejoined at Viesly.

The march was a nightmare. Earlier in the evening a heavy thunderstorm had broken and the rain still continued. The downpour and the heavy volume of traffic had combined to convert the road into a quagmire of such consistency that most of the signallers' bicycles, with their wheels immovably clogged by mud, were of necessity carried a considerable part of the distance. The mere effort of walking on such a surface was a trial of endurance. And the road was still thickly congested with groups of stragglers in addition to vehicles and horses. By 2 a.m. on August 26th the main body of the First Battalion was bivouacked to the north-west of Fontaine-au-Pire on the track that runs down the forward slope towards Cattenières and Estourmel. Captain Hon. F. R. D. Prittie ("B" Company), who had under him in addition 2nd Lieutenant R. D. Baird with a platoon of "A" Company, came in as rearguard two hours later. The Battalion, ordered to furnish outposts for the Brigade, sent out "C" Company (Major G. N. Salmon) into Cattenières. The remaining companies, having fallen out, lay down on either side of the track and sought what rest the inclemency of the weather and the exigencies of the situation were disposed to allow them. "The corn had just been cut, and the sheaves made excellent beds."

While the fighting troops, hurried forward earlier in the day to support

* The amendment was made in accordance with instructions from G.H.Q. Originally the 11th Brigade front was to extend as far as Caudry. But no compensating orders appear to have reached the flank formation and throughout the day there was an unfilled gap between Fontaine-au-Pire and Caudry.

an operation of the nature of which they were only vaguely if at all aware, hurried back at night, with the enemy on their heels—uncertain whether the morrow was to bring an advance, a defensive action, or a continuation of the retreat—were composedly awaiting whatever the future might have in store for them, the Higher Command had reason for no such composure. The situation that developed in the early hours of the 26th might have given anxiety to a Napoleon. In modern war success or failure turns largely upon speedy and reliable communications; and communications in the British Army during the early days of the war left something to be desired. The task of the Signal services indeed bordered on the superhuman. The position of the Headquarters of higher formations changed from day to day, and sometimes almost from hour to hour. G.H.Q. itself was a migratory body. The bulk of the messages were sent by hand, which inevitably spelt a certain delay; and, since it was no uncommon happening for a commander to be in the dark, not merely as to the whereabouts of flank formations but even of the very units under his command, it followed that the value of his information was at a heavy discount, and that orders, especially in the lower grades, were often undelivered or delivered too late.

This failure of communications needs to be dwelt upon because it must bear a full weight of blame for the confusion that reigned on the night of August 25th–26th. It should be added moreover that, bad as communications may have been in other formations, they were probably at their worst in the 4th Division, by no fault of the Divisional Commander, but because his Signal Company R.E. for some undisclosed reason, like his Field Ambulances, his Field Companies, his Heavy Battery, his Divisional cavalry, and his cyclists, had been impounded at St. Quentin by the order of G.H.Q.

The situation that gave the II Corps a sleepless night was briefly this: Sir John French at 7.30 p.m. on the 25th issued orders for the retreat to be continued a further ten to fifteen miles to the south-west. Accordingly at 10.15 p.m. Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien ordered his Divisions (the 3rd and 5th) to resume the retreat at 7 a.m. on the 26th. Sir John French's order threw upon General Allenby's cavalry the task of protecting this movement. The 4th Division, marching parallel with the II Corps, was to proceed to Le Catelet. In order to carry out the tasks assigned to him, it was necessary for General Allenby to hold the ground that the 4th Division had held during the 25th (the high ground immediately to the west and south-west of Solesmes) and retain it until the main bodies of the II Corps and 4th Division should move off on the 26th. In other words the cavalry should have relieved the 4th Division in the Solesmes position, after the 3rd Division rearguard passed through. But there had been a

hitch. The orders issued at 7.30 p.m. on the 25th did not reach General Allenby until 11 p.m., by which time the 4th Division was well on its way to the Wambaix area. The enemy was in possession of the vital ground ; and nothing short of an offensive operation, for which no troops were available, could rectify the mischance. In these circumstances General Allenby hurried to Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, and told him that, unless his troops and the 4th Division could begin their retirement before daylight, the enemy would be on them before they could start. By then it was 2 a.m. on the 26th. As if General Allenby's bombshell were not sufficient of a shock, the Corps Commander then learned from General Hubert Hamilton that the 3rd Division was not in a position to move before nine o'clock in the morning. If the retreat was not to become a rout, there was only one course for Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien to pursue. He must stand his ground, strike back hard at his pursuers and resume his retreat under cover of their discomfiture. This course was proposed to the Commander-in-Chief by whom it was reluctantly accepted ; and a request was sent to the 4th Division by II Corps Commander asking General Snow to hold the ground on the left. This message was received at 6 a.m.

Le Cateau.	Meanwhile shortly after 4 a.m. on August 26th the
The	fighting troops, oblivious of the agonies of decision and
First Battalion	indecision that the night had held for those who guided
in Action.	their destinies, stood to arms in the first light of a

glorious morning and, discovering that the enemy was at hand, engaged him hotly in the best tradition of the British Army. Dawn had broken upon the First Battalion standing to arms in cultivated fields on a forward slope covering the village of Fontaine-au-Pire, and had revealed to the outpost company a body of hostile cavalry and artillery advancing upon Cattenières. Immediately to the south-west of the village, rising out of the high ground on which it stands, there is a considerable knoll pitted on the reverse slope with quarries. The outposts fell back steadily upon the main body of the Battalion fighting their ground and causing casualties to the advancing patrols ; and while the Battalion, in extended order along the glacis to the north-west of Fontaine-au-Pire, held off the attack from the direction of Cattenières and from the north, two companies of the Somerset Light Infantry were sent through the village, to the southern end of Beauvois, to cover the retreat of the Brigade transport. The other two battalions of the Brigade took up a defensive position on and behind the Quarry Knoll, with the Hampshire's flank, the left of the Brigade, thrown back across the railway in front of the bridge, and the East Lancashires (less one company in the quarries) on the slope north of Ligny. Headquarters and the remaining two companies of the Somersets had already

taken up a position south of the railway covering Ligny, where they dug themselves in. Brigade Headquarters were established beside the railway bridge.

The attack which now developed was in its earlier stages confined to artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire. No effort was made by the enemy to advance. But when the First Battalion, in obedience to orders, closed upon the main body of the Brigade at the Quarry Knoll, it was seen that the enemy infantry was coming forward to occupy the vacated position. The initial stages of this withdrawal were covered by "C" Company (Major Salmon), which fell back past the left of the Battalion in order to do so. Then the Battalion, taking advantage of natural cover such as hollow roads and folds in the ground, fell back in succession of companies at a steady walk—almost, despite the hostile rifle and shell fire, as though on Salisbury Plain. During this manœuvre one platoon of "A" Company* which was covering the movement of the remainder of the company came to close quarters with the enemy on the right of the Battalion, and C.S.M. Archer, who was in command, was severely wounded and taken prisoner; there were also a number of other casualties—the first to be suffered by the Regiment. At the end of this miniature rearguard action the Battalion was directed by General Hunter-Weston personally into a position in the sunken road that runs roughly east and west across the Quarry Knoll. The reserve Company ("I") was in the first instance posted behind a hedge on the reverse side of the Knoll, parallel to the railway and two fields north of it. This position proved to be enfiladed by the enemy's machine-guns and was vacated by Captain Lane in favour of the sunken road that runs back south across the railway—a change of disposition that brought his company to the left and slightly in rear of the remainder of the Battalion. At this point Colonel Biddulph established his Headquarters, and drew into reserve with "I" Company two platoons of "B" Company (Captain O. Sutton-Nelthorpe). Major S. H. Rickman, the second-in-command, was put in charge of the forward companies on the Knoll.

For a short time the First Battalion was slightly in rear of the firing line but, as the pressure of the enemy drove in the companies of the Somerset from the exits of Fontaine-au-Pire on the right and the advanced posts of the Hampshires on the left, the position became a front-line trench. By now the enemy was seen to be massing as if for an attack. The artillery, machine-gun, and rifle fire increased. Major Rickman's companies fixed swords and prepared to meet the attack half-way; but no attack developed.

* It is worth pointing out that in those early days the strength of a platoon was never less than forty and in some cases as much as fifty men.

The deadly rapid fire of the Riflemen was too suggestive to the Germans of their own machine guns.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the 11th Brigade was holding its own stubbornly on its immediate front, the situation was becoming increasingly dangerous elsewhere. On the left, the 12th Brigade which, at the beginning of the action, had held the high ground north of the Warnelle Ravine (overlooking Wambaix and Cattenières) to the left and in prolongation of the 11th Brigade position, had, after severe fighting, been driven back across the ravine to the line of the Esnes—Haucourt road. This exposed the left flank of the Hampshires to attacks along the line of the railway. On the right, the 7th Brigade was losing ground in Caudry, which threw open the Somersets' flank to attack, not only through the village of Fontaine-au-Pire but around its southern outskirts. The position of the First Battalion in the sunken road in the centre of the line was obviously less exposed to the danger of outflanking; but the severity of the enemy shell and rifle fire on the front line position may be gauged from the fact that the ground in the neighbourhood of the quarry pits was more than once evacuated by other troops—an opportunity of which "C" Company were swift to take advantage to re-establish the line by a gallant counter-attack under heavy fire. General Hunter-Weston reported this as follows:—"These officers (Major Salmon, Capt. Brownlow and Lieut. Campbell) led this company toward the firing line in the quarry pits after the quarries had twice been evacuated by other troops owing to the heavy fire." Then follows a tribute to the men. "This Company," the report concludes, "maintained its position in the quarry until the end."

At about 1.30 p.m. there was a lull in the enemy activity; some of his troops were seen to be falling back. The four commanding officers in the 11th Brigade, by some coincidence of idea, met without any prearrangement at General Hunter-Weston's Headquarters by the railway bridge. The Brigadier and his brigade-major were up in the firing line. In his absence the commanding officers, deceived by the lull, exchanged views as to offensive action. The 12th Brigade on the left was just then making an effort to re-cross the Warnelle Ravine. It seemed the very moment for a counter-attack. The four commanding officers agreed unanimously on this. But the 12th Brigade met with no success. By 2 p.m. the German line had been reinforced, and the artillery fire broke out again with greatly increased intensity. Fortunately for the garrison of the sunken road on the Quarry Knoll there was a line of poplars parallel to their position, and about two hundred yards behind. This drew the enemy shell-fire, most of which burst in rear of the position.

All along the British left attacks now developed. The 7th Brigade

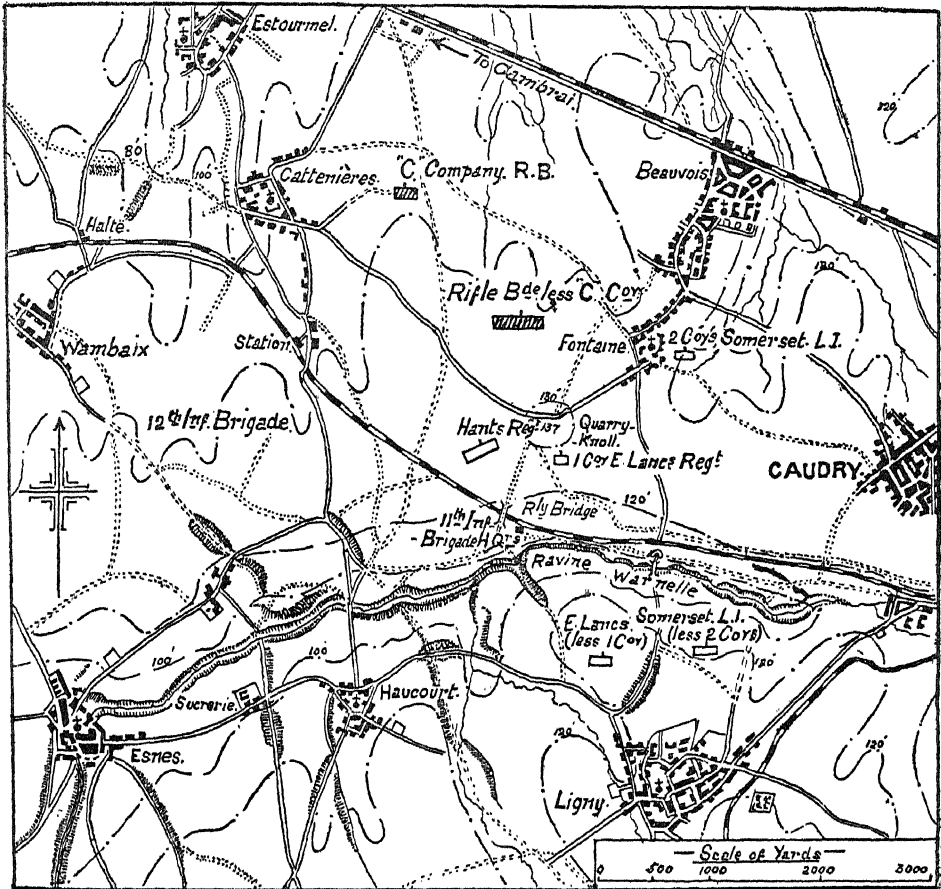
was driven out of Caudry. The troops in Esnes sustained and beat off an attack. On the front of the First Battalion the German infantry made a determined effort to advance in force but, under the withering fire of the Riflemen lining the edge of the sunken road, and the fire maintained by the Battalion machine-gun section from a position between Ligny and Haucourt beyond the Warnelle Ravine, the attack was a complete failure. At about 2.30 p.m. Major Rickman was mortally wounded, the command of the three forward companies devolving upon Major Salmon.

But the loss of Caudry was a serious factor in the situation. Late on the previous evening it had been realized that there was a gap between the 7th and 11th Brigades, and orders were sent to General Hunter-Weston to extend his right to the outskirts of Caudry. The orders were never delivered and throughout the action there was a gap between the 3rd and 4th Divisions of something like a mile in extent. After the 7th Brigade had been forced out of Caudry, the advanced troops of the 11th Brigade found themselves in an ugly salient; for the 12th Brigade on the left had failed to re-establish their position. The 11th Brigade was now under fire from the flanks as well as from the front. It had been foreseen at Divisional Headquarters as early as noon that pressure on the flanks might drive in the 11th Brigade; and a staff officer had been sent down to Ligny to arrange a defensive position upon which the forward troops might fall back fighting. The 135th Battery R.F.A. (18-pounder) was unlimbered to cover the approaches to the village; and the two companies of the Somersets, that had escorted back the Brigade Transport (together with a cavalry machine-gun section detailed from Divisional Headquarters), were directed to protect the guns. Not long after 2 p.m. General Hunter-Weston, who had spent the day in the most reckless disregard of danger, returned with his brigade-major from the front line. He found his four commanding officers waiting at his Headquarters where they were joined by an officer of the Divisional staff. This officer informed the Brigadier that, if the position of the 11th Brigade north of the Warnelle Ravine should become untenable, he was to withdraw his troops to the prepared position at Ligny. All thought of counter-attack was now abandoned; and at about 3 p.m., in view of the loss of Caudry which threw open his right flank defenceless to the enemy, the Brigadier decided to withdraw the Brigade. Could he but have known, the 3rd Bn. Worcestershire Regt. of the 7th Brigade were at that very moment counter-attacking Caudry and reoccupying the southern portion. But there had been no touch on the right flank all that day, and by three o'clock the enemy was well round on the right of the 4th Division and between the two British brigades.

The orders for the withdrawal from the Quarry Knoll were issued

THE BATTLE OF LE CATEAU.

26th August, 1914.



THE FIRST BATTALION REAR-GUARD ACTION ON THE QUARRY KNOLL.
(Showing the dispositions of units between dawn and mid-day.)

verbally to commanding officers by the Brigadier. The East Lancashires (less one company) were already in brigade reserve near Ligny. The remaining company and the Hampshires were ordered to cross the Warnelle Ravine as the first step of the move. This, by reason of the nature of the ground, could with care be screened from the enemy's observation until the troops emerged beyond the Ravine and began to climb the hill to Ligny. The withdrawal of the Somersets and the First Battalion was to take place as soon as the other two units were across the Ravine, but before they came into view of the enemy. Such was the plan proposed by the Brigadier. In practice it did not work out quite as he intended. The Hampshires astride of the railway were easily accessible to orders. The bulk of the East Lancashires were already in position. Two companies of the Somersets were under the hand of the battalion commander. A handful of the other two companies, which had been sent to the aid of the transport at the beginning of the action, were mixed with the Riflemen in the sunken road on the Quarry Knoll and in the quarries near the southern exits of Fontaine-au-Pire. "I" Company of the First Battalion was with Colonel Biddulph. Orders were sent to the forward companies but were never received. The Hampshires and the remaining company of the East Lancashires moved off. The Somerset Light Infantry Headquarters and two companies followed them; and Colonel Biddulph, having sent his orders to Major Salmon, fell back as directed by the Brigadier, with "I" Company. The withdrawal to Ligny was carried out under the protection of "A," "B" and "C" Companies of the First Battalion, together with a few Somersets, under the command of Major Salmon.

By now the forward position, enfiladed from both flanks and steadily bombarded from the front, had become an inferno of shot and shell. The enemy, eager to turn the position, yet unprepared to risk a rush on the resolute Riflemen whose deadly fire was steadily maintained, contented himself with creeping in on all sides until he had established himself within about one hundred yards of the position. The main body of the 11th Brigade, which had formed up in the security of the Warnelle Ravine, could now be seen making its way up the further slope into Ligny. The enemy artillery fire had for the time lifted in order to engage that target. The work of the First Battalion was done; but to remain longer on the ground would have risked a complete encirclement. Already the enemy had crossed the railway embankment on both flanks and, but for a gap of some four hundred yards, the detachment was surrounded. A conference of officers was held, under Major Salmon, to determine the course of action. It was clear that there had been a miscarriage of orders. The Brigade was safe, and to stay longer was not only unnecessary but would be a useless waste

of men. Major Salmon posted Captain Prittie with a handful of his company to open "five rounds rapid" to cover the start of the remainder. The Medical Officer (Captain F. J. Garland) stayed with the wounded, who had perforce to be left behind. Ligny Church was appointed as the assembly place. Then at last the Riflemen fell back upon the Ligny position; and, in the words of the official historian, "the German infantrymen sprang up from their concealed positions and rushed in pursuit." But the time gained by their stand had sufficed the Brigadier to consolidate his troops strongly around the prepared defences of Ligny. The descent into the Warnelle Ravine was through dead ground. When the rearguard began to climb the Ligny hill it came under heavy enemy fire from the vacated position. Two British field guns in the open in front of Ligny village replied over open sights with devastating effect. The German infantry pressed forward to the attack. They were met with a hail of shrapnel, machine gun and rifle bullets. Twice the attack was pressed and twice it was broken down by the British fire; leaving the 11th Infantry Brigade, battered but triumphant, in possession of Ligny with every reason for pride in the day's work.

"If this position," (the "Quarry" line) wrote General Hunter-Weston in his report upon the battle, "which was unsupported by the fire of other troops, had been evacuated early in the day, the results of the consequent advance of the German enveloping attack from the north-west" (the attack which had hurled the 12th Brigade across the Warnelle Ravine at nine o'clock in the morning) "could not have been other than disastrous to the remainder of our Army." Perhaps, in all modesty it may be added that the achievement of the Riflemen in that critical hour, when they covered the withdrawal of the 11th Brigade, was not the least important part of the action. When they fell back but not before, the enemy took heart to advance. Three Jäger battalions and a cavalry brigade had been held at bay by three shattered companies of British Riflemen.

CHAPTER II

THE RETREAT. THE AISNE, AND THE MOVE NORTH.

IT will hardly be supposed that the final stages of the battle of Le Cateau, found the First Battalion, or any other unit, in the parade ground formation in which the action was begun. The manœuvring of the Battalion in the early morning was carried out with the precision of a ceremonial exercise out of the drill book. The accepted standards of 1914 forbade a retirement at any pace other than a disdainful walk. Ground was being given up. There was an order, and discipline required obedience. But the enemy must be clearly shown that no pressure of his was the compelling cause. Except as a target, he must be ignored—and he was! An eye-witness says, “The Battalion received orders to retire which it did almost as though it was a drill movement on parade, one company walking back in line for a couple of hundred yards, while the others covered it with fire; and then another moving back. It was all done very steadily at a walk: and there was no running about at all.”

The first lesson of 1914, given by the hitherto unprecedented density and fire power of the enemy's artillery and machine guns, was that movements unprotected by cover cannot be ceremoniously made, but must be snatched from the enemy by surprise and speed. That lesson was learnt by the First Battalion during their day in the sunken road among the Quarries. The sunken-road position was taken up less as a kind of rough-and-ready trench than as an ambush from which to make a sally. General Hunter-Weston had personally directed the Battalion into the road for the latter purpose. But as the day wore on and the bombardment grew steadily in volume, the necessity both for cover and for thinning out the line to neutralize the shrapnel, began to be realized by officers and men alike. Fortunately the enemy was little more at home with his weapons than were British troops in the defence. A line of trees a couple of hundred yards in rear of the sunken road attracted much of the artillery fire—but sufficient fell upon the garrison to cause casualties upon an unimagined scale. The losses of the First Battalion on August 26th amounted to

eight officers * and some three hundred and fifty other ranks. Of these the bulk were too severely wounded to be moved when the time came to fall back on Ligny, and as has been stated, were left in the care of Captain Garland in the sunken road.

Other factors were also at work, which made for a measure of internal confusion. When the line was thinned out "A" Company (Captain Nugent) was ordered to fall back and lie down out of shell fire; but when there seemed a likelihood of infantry attack, the company returned to the firing line. Men of other units in the brigade trickled steadily into the sunken road throughout the day. When "C" Company advanced and reoccupied the abandoned quarries the Riflemen were joined by remnants of the two companies of Somersets that had been holding the southern exits of Beauvois. By the end of the day, therefore, the three forward companies of the First Battalion were clotted into one conglomerate mass, impossible to resolve into its component platoons, except under cover, and at the expense of considerable time. It was clear, moreover, from the weight of the bombardment and the volume of machine-gun fire that any attempt to retire from the firing line as an organised body of troops would end in complete annihilation. The retreat to Ligny was made at top speed—every man for himself until the rendezvous was reached. "I" Company (now under Captain Hon. R. G. G. Morgan-Grenville—for Captain Lane, shot through both legs, was in the hands of the enemy) waited under cover beyond the Warnelle Ravine, to help the walking wounded of the three forward companies as they swarmed up the slope below Ligny. Captain Morgan-Grenville and Captain Sutton-Nelthorpe stood under cover of the railway embankment like whippers-in, urging the tired men across the valley and stimulating the wounded for the final effort with a dash of brandy from the former's flask.

Captain Nugent of "A" Company, leaving the road and taking advantage of the folds in the Ligny spur, led one substantial party into the village by a longer but better protected route—an act which had the unforeseen consequence of splitting the Battalion; for the main body on reforming at Ligny, which it reached sometime before Captain Nugent's arrival, was immediately detailed to counter-attack a force of the enemy said to be advancing south of the Ravine—only to find, as it was in the act of moving off to carry out this order, that the attack was cancelled, and it was expected, instead, to fall back as rapidly as possible on the line of the Divisional

* *Killed* :

Major Rickman.

Wounded :

Captains Lane, de Moleyns, Liddell, Morgan-Grenville, and Riley.
Lieutenants Foljambe and Coryton.

retreat. The Battalion accordingly, "about 200 strong," marched away with the same equanimity as it had shown in preparing to counter-attack ; and passing General Snow on the road, from whom it received a warm appreciation of its work, proceeded via Caullery and Selvigny * through Malincourt to Le Catelet, whence after a long halt, it went via Vendhuille and Templeux to Hesbécourt, reaching the last named village at 10 a.m. on the 27th—a distance of twenty-three miles from the battlefield.

The honours awarded to the Battalion for its share in the day's fighting included the D.S.O. to Major Salmon, the Legion of Honour (Croix de Chevalier) to Captain Prittie and the Medaille Militaire to Sergeant Walker of "B" Company. The citation for these two awards stated that the recipients were "the last men to leave a trench under very hot fire," a reference to the stand in the sunken road. C.Q.M.S. F. Hedges, Corporal Smith and Acting-Corporal Brooks subsequently received the D.C.M., chiefly for good work at Le Cateau. Corporal Brooks in particular distinguished himself by bringing up ammunition under heavy fire. Majors Rickman and Salmon, Captains Prittie, Brownlow, Morgan-Grenville, and Riley, Lieutenant Campbell, and C.Q.M.S. Hedges, Sergeant J. Roberts, Corporal Smith and Acting-Corporal Brooks were all mentioned in the Commander-in-Chief's despatch.

Meanwhile Captain Nugent, with Captain Prittie the last officer to leave the sunken road, and Captain Brownlow of "C" Company, had collected a party of about one hundred strong at Ligny Church, and met General Hunter-Weston with part of Brigade Headquarters at the head of a column about seven hundred strong, drawn principally from the East Lancashire Regiment but comprising stragglers from all battalions of the Brigade. This composite force, under the Brigadier, began to march south-west through Selvigny, but, finding the road blocked by the troops of another division, marched instead via Elincourt to Serain (8 p.m.), where it bivouacked until 2 a.m. on the 27th. At that hour General Hunter-Weston moved off, with the First Battalion party as rearguard and, marching more or less parallel with the remainder of the Brigade, via Beaurevoir to Nauroy, experienced the small comedy of receiving orders from his own subordinate commander. For Captain G. F. Boyd, D.S.O., the brigade-major, who was with the main body, had reported to Colonel Biddulph ; and that officer, in ignorance of the whereabouts of the Brigadier, had assumed command. The Brigadier's party, after some shelling in Nauroy, and an unsuccessful attempt to engage the enemy, proceeded, harassed by a pursuing force, via Bellicourt to Villeret where the 3rd Division detached a battery and two battalions to break up the pursuit. From Villeret Captain Nugent led his Riflemen via Le Verguier

* Here it halted for a short time and took up a covering position.

to Tertry, where they picked up the Battalion on the march from Hancourt (which had been a rendezvous for the bulk of the Division) to Voyennes. The Battalion transport and the machine guns were still "in the blue"; but the units were beginning to recover from the shock of the battle. Gun carriages and country waggons were impressed to carry the sick and footsore. The astonishing recuperative powers of British infantry which were to baffle the enemy again and again during the progress of the war, were just beginning to reveal themselves to the officers and the staff.

At Voyennes the wise decision was taken to abandon all unnecessary kit, retaining only food and ammunition. This meant a considerable sacrifice of comfort for the sake of gaining additional mobility. But it was carried out * in the height of good spirits. One young officer of the Rifle Brigade, interpreting the order with literal exactness, discarded a treasured blanket of gaudy hue and the finest texture, only to see it snapped up by a hungry looking Highlander, who immediately converted it into a new kilt to replace the rags in which he was marching. Then may be said to have begun in earnest the great retreat from the frontiers of Flanders to the outskirts of Paris, in which the British Army was to prove not only that it could fight better but also that it could march better, than its formidable enemy.

Beyond Noyon the First Battalion was finally reunited; for at Sempigny in that neighbourhood the machine guns and transport, missing since the 26th, rejoined. They had met together in Peronne which they had reached independently, and had marched thence in company via Ham, Nesle and Lassigny. The machine guns were at once detached with Captain Brownlow and two platoons to find outposts at the bridge at Ourscamp, the main body of the Battalion moving on to Les Cloyes, where "A" and "B" Companies, detached the previous day at Muirancourt, came in after a race for the bridge over the Oise to save themselves from being cut off by its demolition. Thereafter, acting as advanced guard to the 11th Brigade, the Battalion pushed on to Saintines (August 31st). On September 1st, covering the retirement of the Hampshires and East Lancashires, the First Battalion and the Somerset Light Infantry were engaged with a half-hearted enemy at St. Sauveur, from which position the Riflemen fell back through Néry where they had a brush with some dismounted German cavalry. "In this engagement," notes an officer of "B" Company, "it was extremely difficult to get the men to fire at anything except the white 'led' horses. It was not until a man got hit

* Except by C.S.M. F. McGahey ("A" Coy.), who, confident of his own stamina and endurance, insisted on carrying his pack throughout the retreat! That this was a "gesture" rather than an act of insubordination is shown by the fact that he was subsequently married in it.

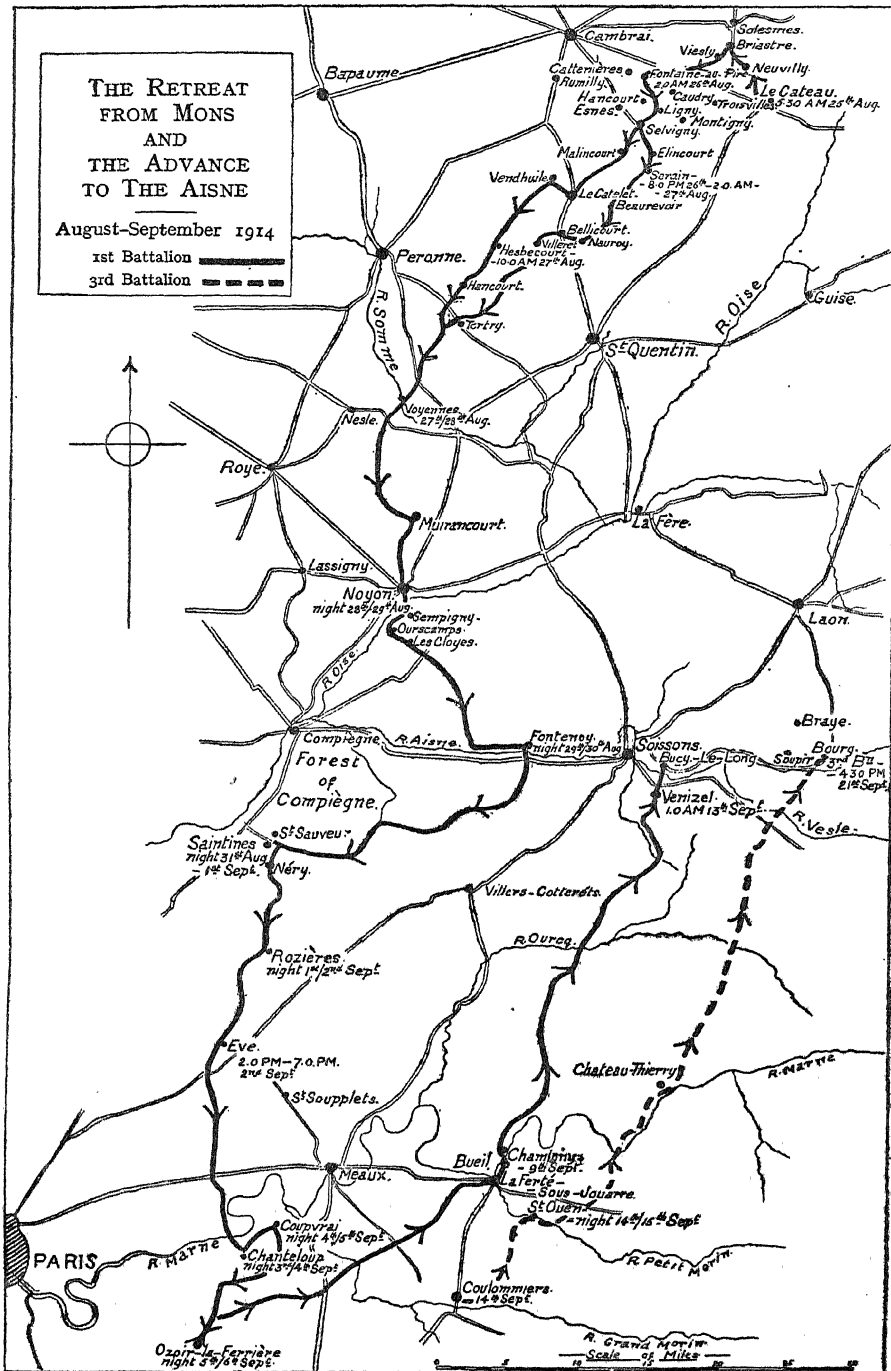
in the stomach by a spent bullet and shouted out, that the men really got at the dismounted cavalry who were firing on us from a position considerably in front of their horses."

The magnificent stand of the gunners of " L " Battery R.H.A. was just over ; and the village was a shambles. A force of hostile cavalry, estimated at about three hundred strong, had been disturbed and had fled, leaving a machine gun, part of their saddlery and a few revolvers. That day was remarkable also for a happening of an entirely different character. For the first and probably the only time in the war, the flag signalling, so carefully taught in peace, was used for communication between " A " Company, which was thrown out upon the slopes to the left of the road, and Battalion Headquarters—with complete success and a great saving of time. The movements of the next four days brought the Battalion by swift stages to the very outskirts of Paris—a bare fifteen miles from the walls of the Capital. At the end of the day's march on September 5th, the First Battalion, with headquarters at Chateau de Chauvennerie, held an outpost line from the railway level-crossing east of that town to Ozoir-la-Ferrière ; and here the first reinforcements arrived. Here also the officers made up some of their deficiencies in kit due to the abandonment of baggage at Voyennes. Requisition forms were left for what was taken—one officer seven years after the end of the war still possessed " an excellent crocheted blanket " acquired at this chateau.

In the twelve days of the retreat the Battalion had covered one hundred and fifty-six miles—all but ten on foot. They well deserved the congratulatory messages of the Division and Corps that were read out by the Commanding Officer on parade.

The
First Battalion.
The March to
The Aisne.

Next day from the general line of retreat it seemed inevitable that Paris would be left isolated, or at best would find itself in the front line. In the early morning of September 6th, the First Battalion fell in, prepared to continue the retreat. To the astonishment and delight of all ranks the order was given to advance. Shortly after midnight orders had arrived directing the advanced guard of the Division to pass the level crossing at Ozoir-la-Ferrière at 5 a.m. General Snow himself was there to see the order carried out. The movement lost some of its impressiveness owing to the fact that the level-crossing gates had continually to be closed to permit the passage of French troop trains ; but nevertheless, " it was," says the Battalion Diary, " a very pleasant surprise to find ourselves facing north again." This change of plan, so sudden, and of such vital importance to the campaign, was due to reasons of which an outline is necessary before proceeding with the narrative.



There were at that time concentrated under the command of General Gallieni (the Military Governor of Paris) not only the garrison of Paris but the French Sixth Army of General Manoury—known together as the Army of Paris. To this powerful force, the pursuing Army of Von Kluck (the German First Army) was foolhardily exposing its right flank in its haste to outflank the main allied forces and throw them back upon the Swiss frontier. On September 4th, at once grasping at the advantage offered by this recklessness, General Gallieni hurried to Sir John French's Headquarters with proposals for a joint attack by his forces and the British. The Field-Marshal was unfortunately absent, and no meeting took place; moreover the orders of General Joffre showed plainly that he, for his part, desired the British retreat to continue. In these circumstances the British retirement was prolonged another day (the 5th). On the 5th, however, in conformity with General Gallieni's plan, General Manoury attacked north of the Marne towards the Ourcq, and met the enemy between Meaux, and St. Souplet (i.e. some twenty miles slightly to the north-west of the British Expeditionary Force). The success of this operation changed the plan of General Joffre for retiring behind the Seine, and determined him at once to resume the offensive.

In the engagements that followed it was not the good fortune of the British to play a dominant rôle. Sandwiched between two immensely superior forces, and almost at the apex of the salient into which the enemy had thrust his head, there was little for the British Army to do in the early stages except harry a foe retreating in a panic of fear lest he should be cut off, by flank attacks, from his lines of communication. Over the Grand Morin, then over the Petit Morin, then over the Marne and the Ourcq, the Germans scrambled back to the line of the Aisne, where at last their right flank was for the moment out of danger. From September 5th until September 12th, when the Aisne was reached, the task of the British was to keep the enemy on the move and deny him all rest; but they could not bring him to action because he did not intend to fight.

The route of the First Battalion in the pursuit lay some fifteen miles to the east of, and parallel to, their own line of retreat. The first three days were uneventful; on the fourth day, September 9th, the march was continued at 4.15 a.m. via St. Martin, which lay in a valley, with the object of seizing the high ground about Tartarel. On the way down into St. Martin there was a long halt, while the sky gradually lightened. The Battalion, which was leading the Brigade, passed through the village safely, but the two rear battalions were not so lucky and were heavily fired on. "We carried out a most hazardous move going into La Ferté-sous-Jouarre in the early morning," writes Captain Sutton-Nelthorpe.

"The whole Battalion filed down a narrow street which was under direct observation of the Germans in fortified houses where they could be seen moving about. They did not fire a shot at us—Heaven knows why." The Marne was crossed at 1 p.m. in single file and without casualties at the weir opposite the village of Chamigny. "C" Company, under Captain Brownlow, which had been detached at Reuil, rejoined the Battalion in billets there, having inflicted thirty casualties on the enemy during the day.

September 10th and 11th were uneventful, but on the 12th, unmistakable signs of the haste of the enemy retreat gave additional heart to men already in excellent spirits. Though the rain had begun to fall heavily, and every one was wet through, no one cared for the weather. Waggon's ditched, abandoned kits and even deserted rations told their tale of the straits in which the enemy was finding himself. Wild stories began to circulate. "All ranks," says a senior officer, "were then told that the Germans were really on the run, and that the German officers were beating their men to get them along the road"—a story to which a parallel could no doubt be furnished from what "all ranks" in the German Army were told a fortnight earlier when they found the dumps of kit that the British had jettisoned to secure mobility in their retreat upon Paris. The Battalion, billeted in a factory, was settling down for the night when at 10 p.m., despite the rain which continued to fall, orders came through to resume the march. By 1 a.m. (September 13th) the Aisne was reached at Venizel, and the 11th Infantry Brigade were rewarded for their forced march. Hours before the remainder of the British Expeditionary Force had crossed the Aisne, General Hunter-Weston's troops had passed over the centre girder of the bridge in single file, had formed up on the flats beyond the river, and had advanced with fixed bayonets upon the heights above.

September 13th.
The Passage of
The Aisne.

The Brigadier's orders for this attack rank perhaps among the briefest in the history of war. "You see," he said to his commanding officers, referring them to their maps which were almost illegible with wet—"You see that there are three 'bumps' in front of you." He then detailed a battalion to each "bump" and kept the fourth in reserve. The attack began in column of fours in the pitch dark. A barrier of carts blocked the road at the foot of the escarpment but no armed opposition was encountered. Before dawn the Rifle Brigade, guided by Captain Riley, with "A" Company (Captain Nugent) as advanced guard, were in possession of the high ground between Bucy-le-Long and Ste. Marguerite. By 9 a.m. the Battalion was through the woods at the top of the ridge, and had halted and thrown forward outposts. Not long afterwards, troops were observed digging in on the left front. A reconnaissance revealed the fact that they were Germans.

Colonel Biddulph at once prepared to attack with two companies. He had gone so far as to give his orders to the company commanders when the Brigadier himself rode up and checked the attack. The German outposts were backed by a main trench line, and General Hunter-Weston was not prepared to engage that unsupported by other troops—a wise precaution—for nowhere else were the British across the river. Had the whole of the advanced troops of the British Army acted with the initiative and promptitude of the 11th Brigade, and established themselves swiftly on the high ground beyond the Aisne, whilst the enemy was still fatigued and disheartened, the German line would probably have become untenable; the Chemin des Dames would have fallen in the subsequent attack of I Corps; there might have been a shattering German defeat. But the crossing was elsewhere postponed until daylight; and with daylight came artillery bombardment of the crossings and a spirited attempt by the enemy to contest any further advance.

The Battle of the Aisne which began in earnest a day later, on the 14th, was fought a day too late. It was fought with great severity on the British right and centre. On the left, with the First Battalion, no serious fighting took place, except on the 13th, when "B" Company was briskly engaged, first in dealing with snipers and later in protecting a section of R.F.A., pushed too far forward, at a cost of some fifty-three casualties, including Major C. E. Harrison (Second-in-Command) and Captain Nugent ("A" Company Commander), both of whom were wounded. Sergeant J. Roberts of "B" Coy. earned the D.C.M. in this affray by carrying Major Harrison back to safety, and then returning to the front line and remaining at duty although five times wounded. He was also awarded the Medal of St. George, 1st Class. The 14th was occupied in digging and strengthening the position. Colonel Biddulph was wounded on the 15th, when Captain Prittie took command. A number of reinforcements arrived providing at last an opportunity for re-equipment and reorganization.

This respite came none too soon. The excitement of the retreat and the subsequent advance had acted as a mental and bodily stimulus sufficient to overcome fatigue. But when the line stabilized and the routine of the trenches began, sheer weariness asserted itself. Officers and men found themselves unexpectedly dropping asleep—in the middle of a sentence, at meals and even standing up. No-man's land was in the neighbourhood of a thousand yards in depth, providing a capital arena for patrol skirmishes. By day all was quiet. After dark activity began on both sides. "We used to race the Boche opposite us for a haystack that was about halfway between the two lines and was the selected place for a standing patrol at night. As soon as dusk came on we used to send an N.C.O. up a high tree

just inside our lines to let us know when the enemy patrol left their trench so that ours might start out too." One night the enemy started earlier. The N.C.O. on climbing the tree shouted down that the patrol was already nearly at the stack. "Give them a shot to steady them," said the officer on duty (Captain Morgan-Grenville). It chanced that the N.C.O. was Sergeant D. Muddle, the crack shot of the Battalion. He sighted his rifle at five hundred yards and, firing out of the tree, brought down his man with his first shot. The war of movement was over for the time. We may therefore leave the First Battalion in their trenches above Ste. Marguerite rubbing shoulders with French Colonial troops from Morocco, gaining their first experience of heavy artillery, experimenting with trench warfare, patrolling and sniping, protecting their front with "spiked sticks, barbed wire entanglements, concealed holes, etc.," and on one occasion on church parade at Bucy-le-Long singing the National Anthem to the strains of "Heil dir im Siegerkranz," obligingly played at the appropriate moment by a German brass band in the enemy's lines—in order to follow the fortunes of another Battalion about to enter the theatre of war.

The
Third Battalion
arrives in France.

On September 12th, the day on which the First Battalion came in sight of the Aisne, the Third Battalion disembarked at St. Nazaire, and at 6.30 a.m. on the 13th, just when the First Battalion was digging in above Ste. Marguerite, entrained for Coulommiers, thirty miles east of Paris, and almost due south of Soissons. The arrival of the 6th Division had been delayed by the shifting of the British base from Havre to St. Nazaire on account of the threat to the Channel ports caused by the successful German advance. It was still further delayed by the inadequate docking and disembarkation facilities, which caused some of the troops (including the Third Battalion in S.S. "Lake Michigan") to be detained at anchor in the roadstead from the 10th to the 12th—when their presence on the Aisne battlefield was urgently needed.

The period following upon the outbreak of war had been quite uneventful. The Battalion was actually in movement before August 4th; for in obedience to "precautionary period orders" Captain E. R. Meade Waldo, with a detachment, was sent to guard the water supply and the approaches to Queenstown; and another detachment went to guard the cable station on Bere Island—these detachments being relieved by Irish Special Reserve Units on August 6th. Mobilization was normal and was completed by August 9th (midnight), although some of the reservists were delayed en route from the Dépôt. From the 10th to the 16th there was route marching to harden the reservists, and the issue and fitting of equipment. On the 17th they embarked at Cork, expecting to wake and find themselves off the

French coast. Instead they found themselves en route for Holyhead, Cam-bridge, and eventually Newmarket, in which area the Division was concentrated and held in training, until September 6th. On the 7th the crossing began.

On detraining at Coulommiers on September 14th, the Third Battalion marched nine miles to St. Ouen and billeted. It had been decided that the 6th Division should be temporarily broken up and distributed amongst the weary troops of the Expeditionary Force. The 17th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-Gen. W. R. B. Doran, C.B., D.S.O.), composed of the 2nd Bn. Leinster Regt., the 1st Bn. Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Bn. North Staffordshire Regt. and the Third Battalion Rifle Brigade, was now about to become Corps reserve to Sir Douglas Haig during its march to the forward area. By September 21st however the 17th Brigade was needed for the front line, to relieve the 5th Infantry Brigade from the neighbourhood of the Ferme de Metz in the Braye valley, to La Cour de Soupir (inclusive), after the heavy attacks of September 20th. At 4.30 p.m. on the 21st the Third Battalion crossed the Aisne at Bourg and relieved the 1st Bn. Royal Berkshire Regt. in the right sector. All the battalions of the 17th Brigade went into the line which ran from right to left—The Rifle Brigade—The North Staffordshires—The Royal Fusiliers—The Leinsters. There was no reserve until the South Staffordshires of the 6th Brigade were sent up a day or so later. The 17th Brigade was now under the orders of the 2nd Division.

In truth the 6th Division had arrived just too late to take part in the heavy fighting which had raged on the right of the British line almost without remission since the 14th of the month. By September 28th the whole offensive was over ; indeed with the exception of some local attacks between the 25th and the 27th, a backwash of a more serious operation against the French, which only affected the 2nd and 3rd Brigades of the 1st Division on the right of the British line, it may be said that the battle ended on the 21st. The Third Battalion made a dawn attack on a German advanced trench on the 25th which, as an officer of the Battalion candidly observes, "was not the surprise it was intended to be." Two officers were killed, one was wounded,* and there were heavy casualties in "C" Company and part of "D" which carried out the operations—the company commander, Major A. D. Boden, being among the killed. From then until early October, both with the First Battalion at Ste. Marguerite and the Third Battalion at Soupir, what was to become, as the war proceeded, the familiar routine of trench warfare, set in.

In view of what now took place and of much that must be recorded later,

* Killed : Major A. D. Boden and Lieut. M. K. Mackenzie (K.R.R.C; attd.).
Wounded : Captain P. A. Kennedy.

it is well to say at once that the great strategic conceptions that governed large movements of troops during the war cannot be discussed in detail in a regimental history. So much as is needful to form a background for the deeds of the Rifle Brigade will naturally be found a place. To admit more, except it cast a new light upon operations, would merely swell the bulk of the volume without adding to existing knowledge. It must therefore suffice to say that, at this stage in the fighting, for reasons widely known and generally admitted to have been valid, the British Expeditionary Force was withdrawn from the position that circumstances had compelled it to occupy, between two considerably larger French Army Groups, and moved north to the left of the allied line, to take the place for which it was originally intended, covering the Channel ports. This movement brought the First Battalion from its trenches above Ste. Marguerite, in which it was relieved on October 7th by French infantry, to Estrées St. Denis; a march of sixty miles, whence on October 11th it entrained for St. Omer. The march from the trenches was the most severe ordeal through which the men as yet had passed. The spell in the trenches following upon the exertions of the retreat and the advance had relaxed them; and it was only by sheer driving that they could be kept going. Directly there was any slackening of the pressure men fell out right and left and lay where they fell. Within the same period the Third Battalion was withdrawn from Soupir and, after a fifty-six mile march to Compiègne, despatched by rail to the St. Omer area, detraining at Blendecques on the 11th (5.30 a.m.) whence it marched to Arques and billeted.

**"The Race for
The Sea."**

**First and Third
Battalions
to Hazebrouck.**

Some day, when all that this generation has to write about the war has been written; and the historian of the future, with all the evidence before him, can form a picture in true perspective, it may be possible to understand why the German army, in the early days, failed to push on and seize the Channel ports. The German High Command must surely have undervalued, if that be not too mild a word, the importance of the British in a world struggle. Perhaps the truth is that, even for so highly trained and numerically vast an organization, it was physically impossible to detach the necessary striking force, without imperilling the whole success of the campaign; and that the smallest slackening of the pressure on the allied forces to the south would have opened the way for a counter-offensive to cut off the German Army from Germany. Be this as it may, it is the fact that, until October, there was practically nothing between Von Kluck and the Channel except a few French Territorial Divisions of dubious military value. Yet the enemy failed to strike. The stabilization of the line on the Aisne was followed by what is usually called "the race for the sea," wherein the Allies and the Germans simultane-

ously shifted the pressure northward, each with the hope of a breakthrough. In this enterprise the First and Third Battalions in the leading Divisions of the British Army were engaged from the beginning.*

The Third Battalion detrained one day before the First, and was hurried in French lorries to Hazebrouck where German cavalry had been reported on the previous day. If the information was correct they had been dislodged by British cavalry before the arrival of the infantry; and instead of a battle—perhaps by way of indemnification for the disappointment—"the men received pay for the first time in France," an experience which they would have been better able to appreciate had it been possible to give them a little leisure for spending what they had earned. But there was work to be done: and it needed to be done promptly. Here again, as on the Aisne, was to be shown that in modern war the fight is to the speedy at least as much as to the strong.

The operation upon which the troops of the III Corps were engaged, with the II Corps on their right, the IV Corps (a skeleton formation) on their left, the cavalry out in front, and the I Corps about to come up behind, was to tumble back the Germans on their unprepared or hastily prepared positions, with the strategic objective of turning the northern flank. For this purpose, on the III Corps front, the 4th and 6th Divisions were advancing side by side, with the 6th on the right and the 4th on the left. But whether because the 4th Division found a greater difficulty in disengaging from the Aisne, or because the troops were wearier, or because the transport facilities afforded by the French were inadequate, that Division began the operation a day behind the 6th Division and never caught up. This exercised an unfortunate influence upon the fighting from the time of the first encounter with the enemy.

When the Third Battalion arrived in Hazebrouck on October 13th. The October 12th, the situation on the immediate front was that the 19th Infantry Brigade (temporarily replacing the Third Battalion 16th Brigade in the 6th Division) held an outpost line along Attack on Hill 40. the Borre Becque to the east of the town, and a screen of cavalry was pushed out, working through Merris, in the direction of Steenwerck. At 8 a.m. on the 13th it was reported that the cavalry were held up in Strazeele, and the 17th Brigade was ordered up in support. On passing through the outpost line of the 19th Brigade and proceeding to Strazeele, it was found that the village, unoccupied by the enemy, was being lightly shelled by him, and that the cavalry had established themselves in Merris but were held up along the line of the Oultersteene—Moelenaeker road where it runs west of the Meteren Becque. The enemy was a mixed force of Bavarian cavalry and Jäger

* See general map facing p. 36.

battalions, with the XIX Saxon Corps reported to be coming up in support from Lille. Such was the situation at 9 a.m. An attack on the Oulstersteene—Meteren ridge was obviously necessary to dislodge the enemy. But to deliver this effectively it was necessary to wait for the 4th Division to come up on the flank and attack the Meteren position and the high ground immediately to the north of it. This necessitated a four hours delay—until after 1 p.m.—during which rain set in, visibility failed, and the enemy's reinforcements had time to come up and strengthen the line.

The frontage of the 17th Brigade attack was from the Hazebrouck—Bailleul railway to the Strazeele—Meteren road, with the North Staffords attacking on the right, between the railway and the road running east and west immediately north of Merris, and the Third Battalion on the left, supposedly in touch with the 4th Division. The Leinsters were held in Brigade reserve and the Royal Fusiliers in Divisional reserve. Artillery support was promised from the Strazeele plateau but the bad visibility did much to negative this. "The attack," says a senior officer who was present, "looked just like an Aldershot field day. First the battalion moving out in small columns (the German shells always seeming to burst in the intervals); then extending and advancing by alternate rushes." The enemy put up a vigorous resistance; but, despite heavy going and the necessarily inadequate artillery support, the attack was steadily and successfully pressed home. By 2.30 p.m. the Third Battalion Headquarters were in Oerberdoen Farm at the cross-roads immediately north of Merris, and all four companies were beyond the Meteren Becque and pushing their way up the slopes of Hill 40, the important high ground above the village to the north-east. But the 4th Division on the left was not up, and touch had been lost. The Leinsters were therefore brought forward and put into the gap on the left of the Third Battalion. On the right the 18th Brigade had encountered heavy opposition, and had not kept pace with the 17th Brigade. This action cost the Third Battalion three officers* (including Colonel Alexander) and seventy-six N.C.O.s and Riflemen killed and wounded. Captain A. K. Hargreaves ("D" Company) won the D.S.O. for his gallantry and Captain S. A. Sherston received the Military Cross. Major Lord Henniker assumed command of the Battalion. During the night the 4th Division captured Meteren.

The First and
Third Battalions
skirmishing.

The First Battalion throughout these operations had been, with the remainder of the 11th Brigade, in reserve to the 4th Division. On arriving at St. Omer at 4.30 p.m. on October 12th it had marched to Blendecques, billeted for the night and embussed next day (13th) for Hondegghem, arriving at

* Wounded: Lt.-Colonel R. Alexander, Captains A. K. Hargreaves and S. A. Sherston.

6.30 p.m.—just about the time when the Third Battalion was consolidating the position it had won on Hill 40. On the 14th the First Battalion moved up to Flêtre (north-west of Meteren on the Bailleul road) ; and on this day the Third Battalion, having entrenched the Oultersteene—Hill 40 position, advanced at 2 p.m., with the remainder of the 17th Brigade, in the direction of Steenwerck, moving slowly on account of the enclosed country. Overtaken by nightfall at the hamlet known as Blanche Maison, and being out of touch with the 18th Brigade on the right and the 4th Division on the left, “ we bivouacked in a square in close touch with the enemy.”

On October 15th the Third Battalion, after sending 2nd-Lieutenant J. H. Smith* into Steenwerck with a patrol which soundly defeated a party of Uhlans (killing four and capturing the fifth), followed up the success by occupying the village. Meanwhile the First Battalion, after a false start in the direction of Berthen, was detailed with two companies of the 1st Bn. East Lancashire Rgt. to furnish the main guard of the 11th Brigade (itself the advanced guard of the 4th Division). In this capacity it pushed through Bailleul, where the vanguard (two companies of the East Lancashires) came in touch with the enemy. It halted for the night east of the town. By this time, however, the 17th Brigade was about to carry out an important night operation which, had it been shared in by the 4th Division, could not have failed to give a far reaching advantage to the British Expeditionary Force. The operation, directed by the 6th Division, was to secure the crossing over the Lys at Bac St. Maur. Other troops of the Division were to seize the crossing at Saily in conjunction with some French cavalry. Making all allowance for the difficulties of the 4th Division on the outer flank, it ought to have been possible to co-operate, as was contemplated in the Corps Order, by simultaneously seizing the crossings at Erquinghem and Pont de Nieppe. The 17th Brigade operation was successful. In the darkness they heard on their left the sound of horses and transport rumbling over pavé road. They thought it was the 4th Division advancing on Erquinghem, but it was actually the enemy in retreat. Next day the First Battalion, with the Somerset Light Infantry, was despatched across country from the 11th Brigade lines between Steenwerck and Neuve Eglise, to seize the Erquinghem crossing. They reached Les 3 Tilleuls, at the cross-roads a mile north of Erquinghem and then, the evil spirit that had fruitlessly sent them towards Berthen on the previous day being still at his mischief, “ fresh orders were received cancelling the operation, and we returned to billets at La Crèche.” Once again on the 18th a similar confusion of orders was to vex the First Battalion when “ at 5 p.m.,” so says the Diary, “ we received orders to attack L’Epinette—La Prevôte in conjunction with the East Lancashires in order

* He won the Military Cross for this and was mentioned in despatches.

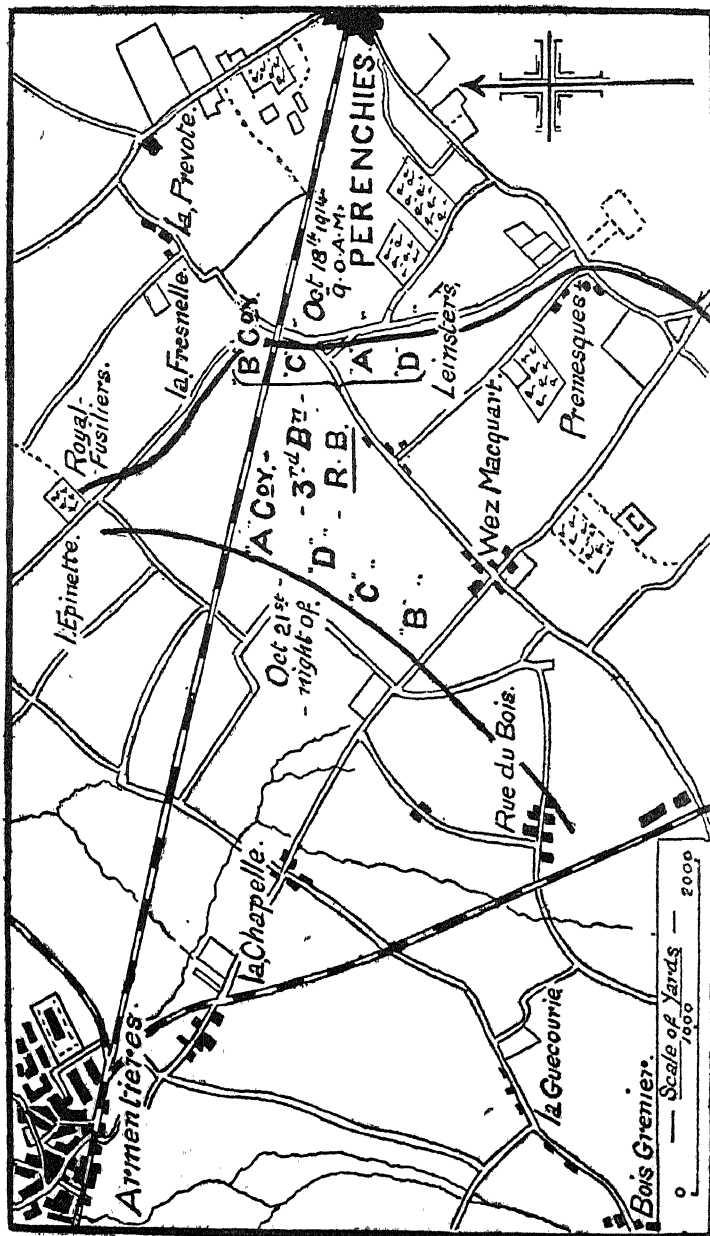
to fill a gap ; but at 5.45 p.m. the gap having already been filled, orders were cancelled and we went into billets on the outskirts of Armentières." This however is anticipating the narrative.

October 16th and 17th were uneventful for the Third Battalion, which by 7.15 p.m. on the latter date had turned northward to La Chapelle d'Armentières where it put out an outpost line. The importance of this move was that, had the 4th Division been in a position to keep pace on the left, the Perenchies ridge could have been occupied by the 17th Brigade that afternoon without much opposition—for the refugees told the Brigade staff there were hardly any Germans in Perenchies. The 17th was equally uneventful for the First Battalion, which moved one and half miles into new billets. October 18th was a date of the utmost importance to both Divisions and to both Battalions.

On that day a general advance was ordered. On the 6th Division front the 17th and 18th Brigades attacked—the 17th Brigade attack being carried out by the Leinsters on the right, with their right on the Armentières—Lille road, and the Third Battalion on the left with their left on the Armentières—Lille railway. The objective was the Prêmesques—Perenchies ridge. It was understood that the 4th Division was prolonging the attack north of the railway. From the outset however the Third Battalion was hampered by the failure to find touch with the 4th Division. A platoon sent out towards L'Epinette was entirely unsuccessful and consequently the left flank was of necessity refused along the railway line. "A," "B" and "D" Companies made the attack, with "C" Company in support. By 9 a.m. the Battalion found itself arrested by a prepared position strongly held about a mile from Perenchies, and was unable to advance beyond the level-crossing south of La Fresnelle. "A," "D" and half of "C" Companies, held the road south of the crossing, while "B" Company and the remainder of "C" were thrown back along the railway facing north, from which quarter considerable machine gun fire was developing. Here the attack remained stationary, awaiting the arrival of the 4th Division. The Royal Fusiliers from Divisional reserve were brought forward on the left of the Third Battalion, and succeeded in taking the pressure off the flank by pushing out to L'Epinette and holding it. This doubtless was "the gap" that the First Battalion was at 5 p.m. called upon, from the 4th Divisional reserve, to come up and fill ; but, as has already been recorded, the order was cancelled ; the First Battalion instead of fighting side by side with the Third, and going forward with it to the coveted ridge, was kept in billets in Armentières ; and the ridge remained in German hands until the last phase of the war—October four years later.

THE BATTLE OF ARMENTIÈRES.

18th October, 1914.



THE ATTACK OF THE THIRD BATTALION ON PERENCHIES.

The 17th Brigade line at the end of the day was from Mt. de Prêmesques—through Prêmesques, which was captured by the Leinsters—three hundred yards west of the Fort de Senarmont, one of the outer defences of Lille—the level crossing a mile west of Perenchies—L'Épinette. From there, on the 4th Division front, the line ran back to the neighbourhood of Houplines. The day's fighting had cost the Third Battalion three officers * and sixty-six N.C.O.s and Riflemen in casualties. For rescuing men left out in front under heavy shell fire Corporal T. Green was awarded the D.C.M. The Battalion machine guns, firing from a cottage window near the level crossing, caused heavy losses to the enemy near La Fresnelle.

Next day the line remained stationary. No further advance could be attempted with the II Corps held up on the right and the 4th Division held up in Houplines.

The First and
Third Battalions.
Minor Operations.

An armoured train bringing up reinforcements to the enemy on the Third Battalion front promised at first to give a target by over-running its stopping place, but soon appreciated its danger, and steamed back. The First Battalion meanwhile was withdrawn from the 11th Brigade and hurried to reinforce the 10th Brigade at Houplines, where it relieved the Seaforth Highlanders in an entrenched position at Le Ruage. The 20th was a quiet day for both Battalions. The 21st brought a feint attack against the First Battalion, which, if anything more serious was intended, broke down before its fire. On the 17th Brigade front however, it was the occasion of an attack upon the Leinsters in Prêmesques that annihilated two companies and recaptured the village. The North Staffordshires and the remainder of the Leinsters successfully deprived the enemy of the opportunity of exploiting his success; but this incident and the severe mauling given to the 18th Brigade at Ennetières and La Vallée, to the south, necessitated the abandonment of the forward positions on the 17th Brigade front. During the day a line was chosen from Rue du Bois—across the railway at Porte Egal Farm—to L'Épinette in touch with the 4th Division. To this line, partially entrenched during the day, the forward troops of the 17th Brigade were withdrawn at nightfall, the Third Battalion holding the Porte Egal Farm position between the Lille road and the railway, with all companies in the line, "B," "C," "D," and "A" from right to left. The position was strongly attacked by the enemy next day without success. The attack was renewed on the 23rd, under a heavy bombardment in which "C" Company in the centre suffered severely—Lieutenant D. B. Landale of that company being killed, and sixty rank-and-file killed and wounded. Next day, the 24th, the Battalion was relieved and lent to the 18th Brigade

* Killed: Captain N. J. B. Leslie.

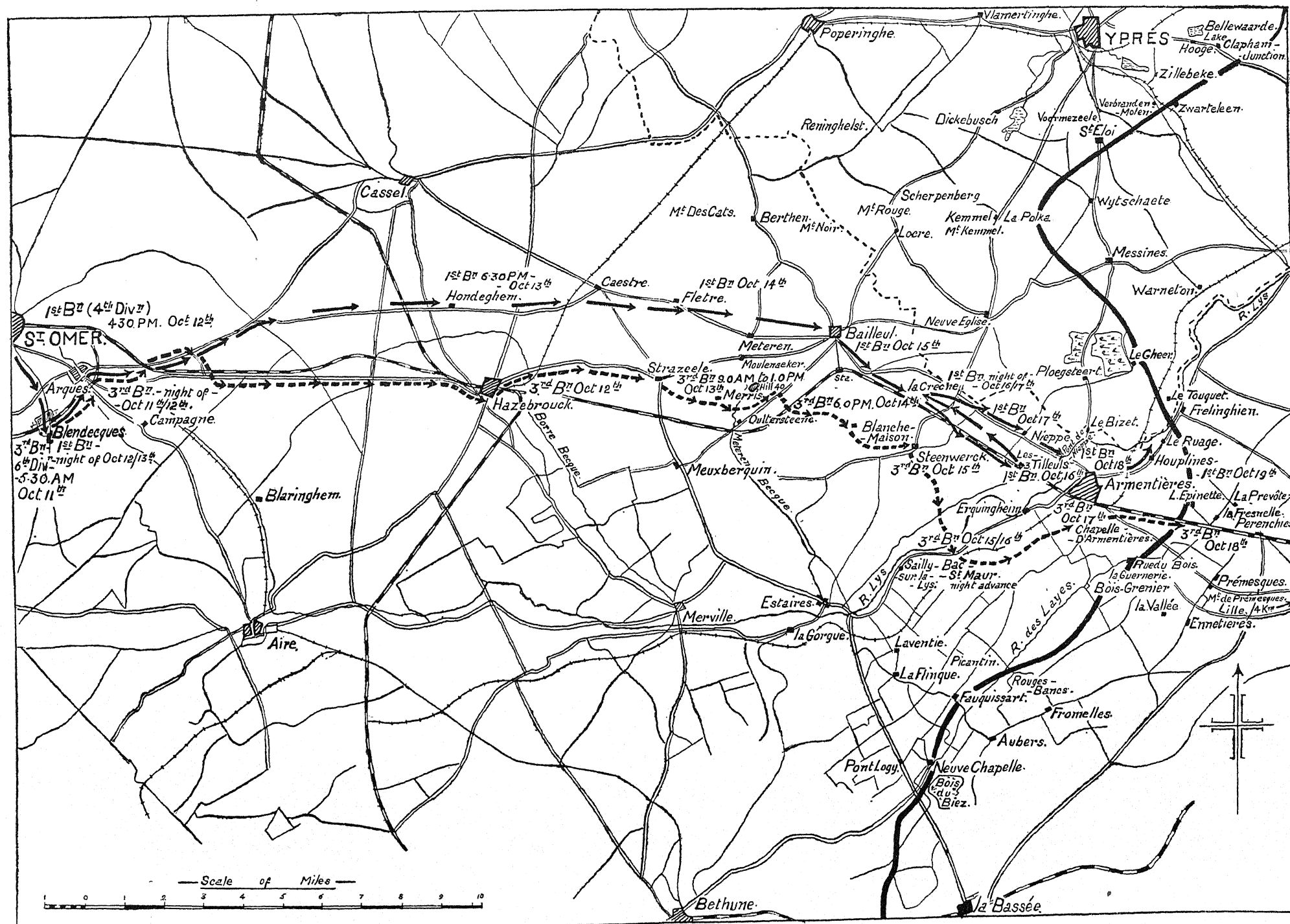
Wounded: Captain R. E. Porter, R.A.M.C., Lieutenant D. B. Landale;

at Bois-Grenier, in which sector on the following day, after digging a line east of La Guernerie until 7 p.m., it marched to Grande Flamengerie Farm and relieved the 2nd Bn. York and Lancaster Regt. in their trenches.

Meanwhile on October 22nd the First Battalion, after its repulse of the German attack, was relieved at Le Ruage by the Royal Irish Fusiliers and despatched, via Houplines bridge, northward to Ploegsteert ("Plugstreet") where, later in the year, it was to fight an engagement. After its departure, however, orders were received to take over the line of the 12th Brigade, in consequence of which it became necessary to divert the Battalion back to Le Bizet, whence at 6.30 p.m. the companies were sent out independently to take over the trenches of the Lancashire Fusiliers and the King's Own from the Lys River at Frelinghien to the cross roads three-quarters of a mile south of Le Gheer. This line ran through the village of Le Touquet, partly held by the British and partly by the enemy, where "enemy snipers were in houses sometimes only twenty yards from houses held by us." On November 8th in this house-to-house fighting A/Corporal F. C. Spain of "C" Company earned his D.C.M. He stood on the top of a wall and signalled back the enemy's movements until most of the wall had been blown away. The line at Le Touquet was over thirteen hundred yards in length. The strength of the Battalion was less than six hundred. Communication across the Lys River was virtually impossible. The enemy made frequent half-hearted attacks which were easily repulsed. On October 30th at 7.15 a.m. the Germans made an effort to advance in thin lines of skirmishers. They were at once engaged with gunfire. Some three hundred yards from the front line there was a patch of dead ground on which they succeeded in collecting. But the shooting of the British artillery was too accurate. They were quite unable to get forward; and eventually fell back at 2.15 p.m., under cover of their own artillery fire which continued throughout the remainder of the day. During one period of an hour and thirty-five minutes no less than one hundred and ninety-five shells fell near the machine-gunners—yet only one man was hit. That night Captain O. S. G. Gilliat was killed. These were merely holding attacks, designed by the enemy to pin down the British and prevent the transfer of troops to the northern area where his main energies were being thrown into the great battle at Ypres. Nevertheless it was an anxious time for the 4th Division. There were no reserves whatever, either to the Division or Brigade. The First Battalion improvised a local reserve by bringing up the transport drivers and holding them in readiness every night. In these trenches, or rather isolated posts, the Riflemen remained until November 10th, when on relief they rejoined the 11th Brigade in Ploegsteert Wood. Both sides had had their moments of "nerves." The First Battalion

THE BRITISH ADVANCE.
12th-18th October, 1914.

[To face page 36]



MOVEMENTS OF THE FIRST AND THIRD BATTALIONS, ILLUSTRATING THE ACTIONS OF METEREN AND MERRIS, AND THE ADVANCE GUARD OPERATION OF THE THIRD BATTALION.

observed that on two successive nights rapid fire broke out far away in the north and travelled down the entire front for no assignable reason. The configuration of the line, too, held its possibilities of alarm. At Le Touquet, on the right of the position, where the trenches were unconnected, a front line post was echeloned in rear of its nearest neighbour on the left. One night a frantic message came: "The Germans are behind us on the right." Reinforcements were hurried down to the source of the report, where a N.C.O. and five Riflemen were discovered in the last bay of the trench, facing about and covering the right rear post. There was a haystack burning in No-man's-land. The N.C.O. related how he had seen the figures of the enemy creeping round it and passing to the rear of the British line. He had recognized them by their grey uniforms. Investigation however revealed the "enemy" to be four cows!

The Third Battalion rejoined the 17th Brigade at about this time, taking over trenches near La Chapelle d'Armentières. The First Battle of Ypres, though its repercussion was felt, did not extend far enough south to involve the front of the III Corps, where the British advance was now definitely checked, and stationary warfare conditions were beginning to govern the campaign.

The
Second Battalion
ordered to the
Front.

The Second Battalion received its orders to sail for the front on August 25th, the Regimental Birthday. On September 8th the Battalion embarked at Bombay in the S.S. "Somali"; but there was a delay of twelve days in

Bombay harbour waiting for the escort and the remainder of the convoy. On October 22nd Liverpool was reached, and next day Winchester, the home of the Regiment, where the 8th Division (Maj.-Gen. F. J. Davies, C.B.) was in process of concentration. The Second Battalion, strength twenty-two officers and one thousand and one other ranks, marched to its camp at Hursley Park on the 24th—when the men were at once given forty-eight hours' leave. The Battalion was posted to the 25th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-Gen. A. Lowry Cole, C.B., D.S.O.) then in the act of formation. Training was carried out until November 4th, when the Division received its orders to move. On November 5th the Battalion embarked at Southampton in S.S. "Victorian," arriving at Havre on the 6th. On November 11th, just at about the time when the First and Third Battalions were settling down to trench warfare, the Second Battalion detrained at Strazeele and marched to billets in Vieux Berquin.

The 8th Division was destined to join the 7th Division in the IV Corps; the Commander of which, Sir Henry Rawlinson, had returned to England to hasten its departure. Its arrival synchronized with a slackening in the intensity of the battle of Ypres which permitted the relief of the

I Corps by the French a few days later and the concentration of the whole British Expeditionary Force between La Bassée and Kemmel. In this scheme of reorganization the IV Corps was to come into line between the III Corps and the Indian Corps, taking over part of this front and incidentally relieving the 8th and 14th Brigades of the II Corps which had temporarily come under the Indian Corps Commander. On November 14th the 8th Division went into line in the area Rue du Bois—Fauquissart, directly in front of the famous Aubers Ridge; the 25th Brigade relieving the 14th Brigade. The Lincolns were sent in to relieve the Devons on the right and the Royal Berkshires to relieve the East Surreys on the left. The Royal Irish Rifles went into billets just north of Laventie in readiness to relieve the Jullundur Brigade of the Lahore Division on the following evening. And the Second Battalion was held in Brigade reserve at La Flinque. The weather was wet and cold, and the mud already so deep in the trenches that here, as also farther north, fascines were being laid down (for duckboards were unheard of) to make the communication trenches even passable. On the 15th, the Royal Irish Rifles carried out the relief of the Jullundur Brigade. Already the troops, new to the mud of Flanders, were beginning to discover what that mud could mean. An alarming percentage of rifles were found to be so clogged as to be useless. Paraffin was hastily served out as a remedy. Colonel Stephens was soon afterwards moving heaven and earth and the Ordnance Department—the last the least responsive of the three—for the issue of one ramrod per platoon to deal with the problem of jammed cartridges. These facts are of more than passing interest—for the mud, which was in the future to change so many plans, was responsible for an immediate change in the plans of the 25th Brigade. The Lincolns reported at 8.45 a.m. on the 15th that the enemy was working up their trenches, and asked for reinforcements. Partly on this account, but partly because of the serious clogging of the rifles, the Brigadier, who had purposed to relieve the Royal Berkshires with the Rifle Brigade, determined instead to send one company of the Rifle Brigade to reinforce the Lincolns and to hold the remainder of the Battalion in reserve at La Flinque. “B” Company (Major C. V. N. Percival) was accordingly sent up behind Chapigny, whilst at the same time “D” Company (Captain R. Verney) moved forward from La Flinque to take up a supporting position in rear of the Royal Irish Rifles. That night the first casualty befell the Battalion.

November 17th. Next morning, November 17th, the Second Battalion
The relieved the Lincolns and came into the line for the
Second Battalion first time. It provides an instructive side-light upon the
in Laventie Sector. confused nature of the fighting and upon the number of
civilians not merely in the forward area but dwelling in the very front line,

to record that, in consequence of the severity of the sniping in the trenches, Colonel Stephens found it necessary to apply to Divisional Headquarters for gendarmes to discriminate between harmless inhabitants and suspicious characters. On November 18th the 23rd Brigade came into the line between the 24th and 25th Brigades, the inner flank units closing up towards the outer flanks in order to make room. In execution of this movement the Second Battalion side-stepped northward, handing over to the Devons ; and came finally into the sector of trenches which they were to share in holding until the following March. A reconnaissance of the enemy trenches was also carried out that night. Next night (the 19th) the enemy was observed to be sapping forward, and so, on the following night (20th), Lieutenant R. C. J. Chichester-Constable took out a patrol which reported the trenches opposite to be strongly held, and the passage of transport through the village of Aubers. Work was steadily continued for the improvement of the trenches until 6 p.m. on the 21st ; when the first tour was brought to an end on relief by the Royal Berkshires ; and the Second Battalion marched back to billets at Laventie with forty-four men suffering from severe frostbite.

The record of these early days could be almost indefinitely enlarged for all three Battalions. Everything was new, and relatively trifling incidents have found their way into the war diaries as a natural consequence. Far the least grateful task of the historian, in a narrative so compact of individual and collective heroism and endurance, is the duty of deciding what calls for inclusion, and what, for sordid reasons of space, must be left out. But there are great battles ahead and we are still in the first few months of the war. If the tale is to be told within reasonable limits, the winter of 1914-15 must be sketched in broadly and swiftly.

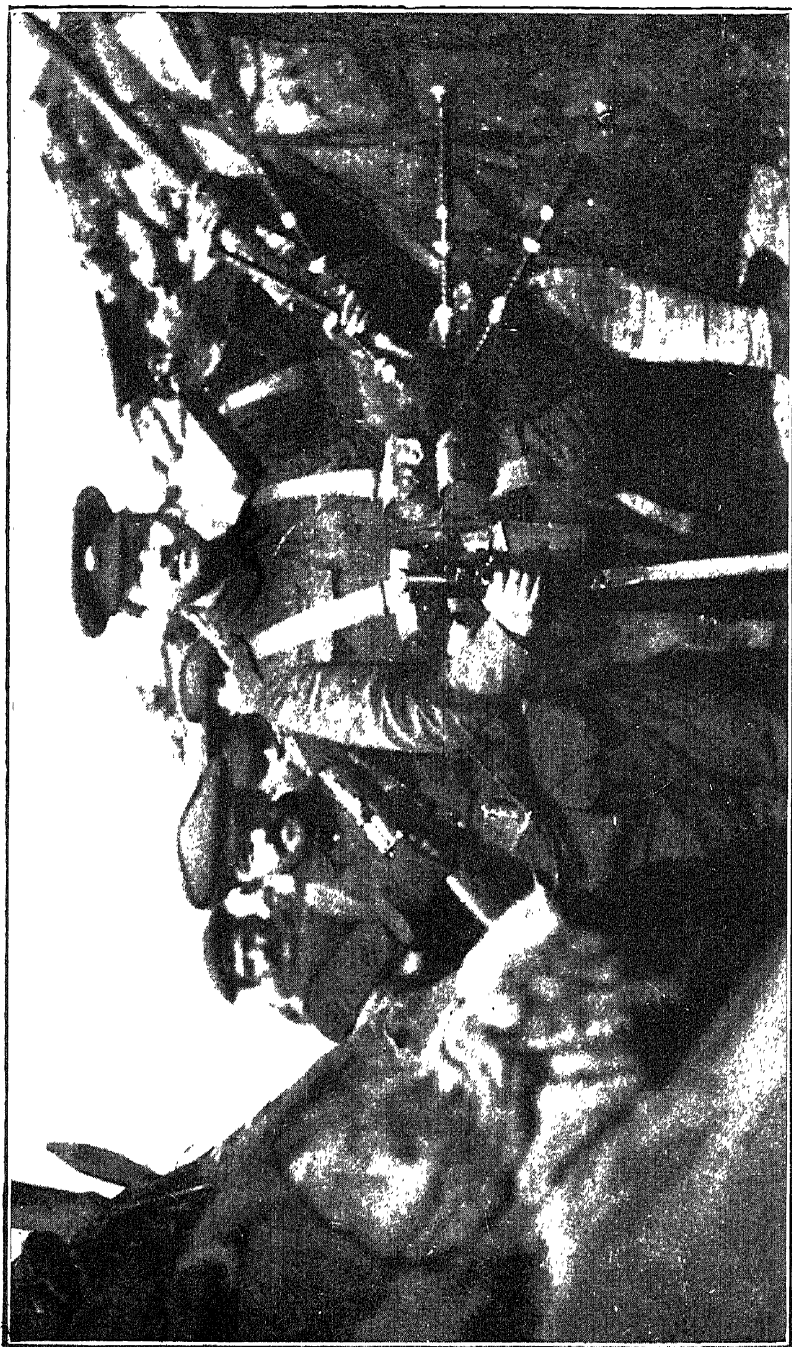
The Second Battalion, in the words of its own chronicler, " was posted in a fairly quiet part of the line "—" though," he adds enviously, " not so quiet as the bit just to the north of us." The line of trenches ran for roughly three-quarters of a mile about one hundred and fifty yards east of the Rue Tilleloy—the right of the Battalion sector being immediately east of Chapigny, and the left in front of Fauquissart and a couple of hundred yards north of the Fauquissart—Trivelet road. The tour was three days in and three days out—the reserve billets being d'Esquin or Laventie ; (with luck, Estaires—which was " distinctly comfortable." Laventie " savoured too much of the farm yard "). Patrols went out every night ; but, as the Flanders mud began to develop its own distinctive qualities, an impassable morass appeared in No-man's-land which prevented either side from meeting on these expeditions. There was, however, a ruined farm between the lines, " on which each side used to affix notices in order to score off the other." " Throughout the winter we were remarkably well fed. Fauquissart at the beginning

provided chickens, potatoes and coal." And on another occasion, "all the pigeons at an inn were killed, in case of spies, and made a meal for 'C' Company." . . . In short, the British Rifleman, always hungry, always determined to make the best of things, and always capable of extracting comfort and good fellowship out of the most unpromising material, was settling down to win the war by sheer dogged staying power.

On November 20th the First Battalion, now commanded by Captain (A/Lieut.-Col.) W. W. Seymour, took over the trenches along the eastern side of Ploegsteert Wood that it was to continue to hold without coming out of the line until the following March.* Much at the same time Maj.-Gen. H. F. M. Wilson, C.B., late of the Second Battalion, took over the command of the 4th Division. The Third Battalion was digging itself in tenaciously at La Chapelle d'Armentières. The men were constantly in the trenches—once for an unbroken spell of thirty-one days; the Germans shelled them heavily from time to time, and made more than one demonstration. But they positively refused to be downhearted. "It was getting near Christmas, when we all confidently believed the war would end; and the farmhouses close to the trenches still held chickens and pigs, which kept us all in good spirits!"

On November 27th the Second Battalion raided an advanced post. The raiding party of twenty-four men drawn from "B" Company under Lieut. E. Durham, Sergeant Davis and Corporal Thompson set out at 1 a.m. to surprise an enemy sap about one hundred and twenty yards from the British line. They crept out until they were within charging distance and then rushed the post. The enemy fled back to their main trench line abandoning the sap; which was then occupied and held for some thirty minutes whilst observations were taken. At the end of that time the raiding party was ordered to return and did so. Very unfortunately the gallant officer in charge, in his eagerness to pursue the enemy down the communication trench leading to the German line, outdistanced his men and was killed. The success of the operation is evidenced by the fact that it received the honour of being mentioned in the text of Sir John French's Despatch. On December 18th, in conjunction with an attack by the 23rd Brigade, the same Battalion sent four platoons, two from "A," one from "C," and one from "D" Company, to the enemy's advanced trenches. The operation, which in so far as it affected the Second Battalion was almost

* The system of holding the line in the 11th Brigade sector was on a four battalion front with two companies in the line, one in battalion reserve and one at Nieppe in Brigade reserve. It was an unsatisfactory system as battalion head-quarters was never out of the line, no battalion could ever be pulled together by its commanding officer and the Brigade reserve consisted of four detached companies with no commanding officer. A change was made when Brig.-Gen. C. B. Prowse took over the Brigade.



1st BATTALION IN THE TRENCHES AT PLOEGSTEERT.

(Rifleman Hendry with his Pipes.)

1914.

bloodless, was a valuable lesson both as to the slowness of communications and as to the effect of the mud on the rifles. In spite of every care it was impossible to shoot. A second platoon from "C" Company relieved the first one when only five rifles were left in working order.

December 19th.
The
First Battalion
Attack on
German House.

On the following day, December 19th, the First Battalion carried out a minor operation of a difficult and costly character against the enemy positions to the east of Ploegsteert Wood, for a proper appreciation of which some preliminary explanation is needed.

On December 17th Sir John French ordered a vigorous attack all along the British line to begin next day in conjunction with a French attack at Arras. Lt.-General Pulteney, III Corps Commander, accordingly sent out orders timed 12.45 a.m. on the 18th to the effect that, whilst the II Corps on the right would resume the offensive together with the French north of the Douve River, the rôle of the III Corps would be to "demonstrate and seize any favourable opportunity to capture any enemy's trenches on their front." This was modified by a further order timed 10.20 a.m. which laid down for the III Corps the definite task of attacking some point of the enemy's line with the object of preventing him from moving his reserves to meet the French attack. The 4th Division was ordered to carry out this undertaking: the 6th Division standing fast. The point selected was the enemy trench line east of Ploegsteert Wood between Le Gheer and St. Yves—the operation being "limited in its scope to driving the enemy from the salient in his line and readjusting the line now held by the 4th Division."

General Wilson issued his orders on the 18th, defining the task of the 4th Division and ordering the 11th Infantry Brigade to press home the attack at 2.30 p.m. on the 19th. Meanwhile the French attack at Arras—originally the whole *raison d'être* for the attack of the 4th Division—was abandoned; but the operation of the 4th Division having now been ordered was persevered in. For this decision there was good reason, as a glance at a trench map will show. The configuration of the line at the point selected was extremely awkward from the British point of view, and, if the "German House" defences could be taken and the line straightened out, a valuable tactical gain would result.

The shell shortage was already beginning to be severely felt. In the original Corps Operation Order, a table of maximum expenditure on the Corps front was laid down—18-pdr. forty rounds, 4.5-inch howitzer twenty rounds, 4.7-inch forty rounds, 6-inch howitzer thirty rounds (with 13- and 60-pdr. and 6-inch and 9-inch as required)—an allowance, for a whole Corps artillery, which one gun of the respective calibres might easily have expended

in anything from five minutes to an hour later in the war. When the rôle of the Corps was changed from general demonstration to a specific attack, a confidential memorandum was issued cancelling this table, but urging the utmost care. Two other facts cast an ominous light on the artillery situation. The 6-inch howitzer battery of the 4th Division, which was on loan to the II Corps, was just about to revert to its rightful owners. On the 18th December, the III Corps received this message: "Please inform General du Cane (the chief of Staff III Corps) that II Corps place ten rounds of 6-inch howitzer of 4th D.A. at disposal III Corps." The second fact is that when additional guns were offered on loan for the bombardment they were refused because there was a shortage of ammunition for what were already available.

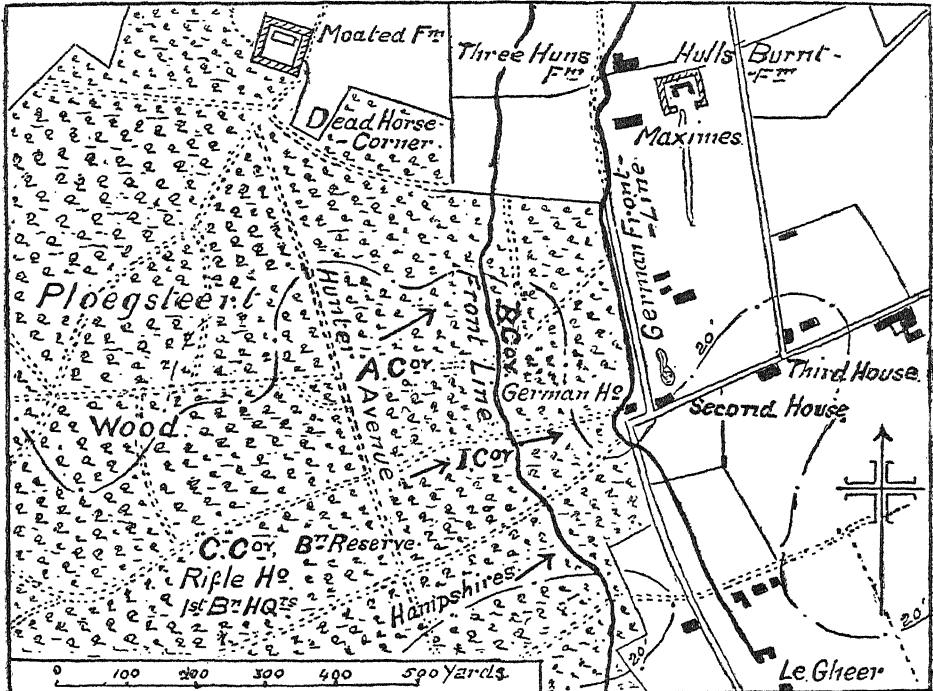
The troops chosen by General Hunter-Weston to make the attack were the Rifle Brigade and the Somerset Light Infantry. The Hampshire Regt. on the right of the Rifle Brigade was to swing its left forward to conform with the advance, when it was completed. The 11th Brigade, said the order, would attack and "capture the bight in their line"—the Rifle Brigade astride of the road running east by north from German House, with the enemy's defences about three hundred yards east of German House as their objective, the Somersets on the left of the Rifle Brigade to capture the enemy's breastwork on their front. The brunt of the attack was thus on the First Battalion, with the strongly fortified buildings in addition to trench lines in front of them. The Brigade Order further provided for synchronization of watches by telephone—which perhaps accounts for the preparation of the enemy for the attack.

Colonel Seymour made his plan of attack as follows:—

"I" Company (Captain Morgan-Grenville) would make the assault on a two-platoon front, with "B" Company (Captain Sutton-Nelthorpe), less one platoon detailed for carrying parties and connecting files, garrisoning the front line trenches. "A" Company (Captain Riley) was to be in support in the breastwork line known as Hunter Avenue; and "C" Company (Captain D. J. C. K. Bernard) in reserve in the neighbourhood of Rifle House (Battalion Headquarters). The two assaulting platoons would take up a "jumping off" position by the edge of the wood, under covering fire on German House from a pack gun detailed for the purpose. At 2.30 p.m. they would advance astride the road leading east-north-east to German House, being replaced on the edge of the wood by the remaining two platoons of "I" Company, from the front line trenches, in readiness to reinforce. The attacking platoons, accompanied by Sappers detailed from No. 7 Field Company R.E., would then capture successively German House, Second House and Third House, detaching parties of one N.C.O. and eight Riflemen, together with a few Sappers, to consolidate the ground gained and put the captured houses in a

PLOEGSTEERT WOOD.

19th December, 1914.



THE FIRST BATTALION ATTACK ON GERMAN HOUSE.

state of defence. Meanwhile two platoons of "A" Company would move up from Hunter Avenue to reinforce the front line, being replaced in Hunter Avenue by two platoons from "C" Company in reserve. Corporal F. E. Roe,*—a retired Lieutenant of the Royal Navy—voluntarily went out to reconnoitre the enemy's trenches and stayed out in front for three hours completely indifferent to the danger. He received the D.C.M., and later a commission, for this distinguished gallantry.

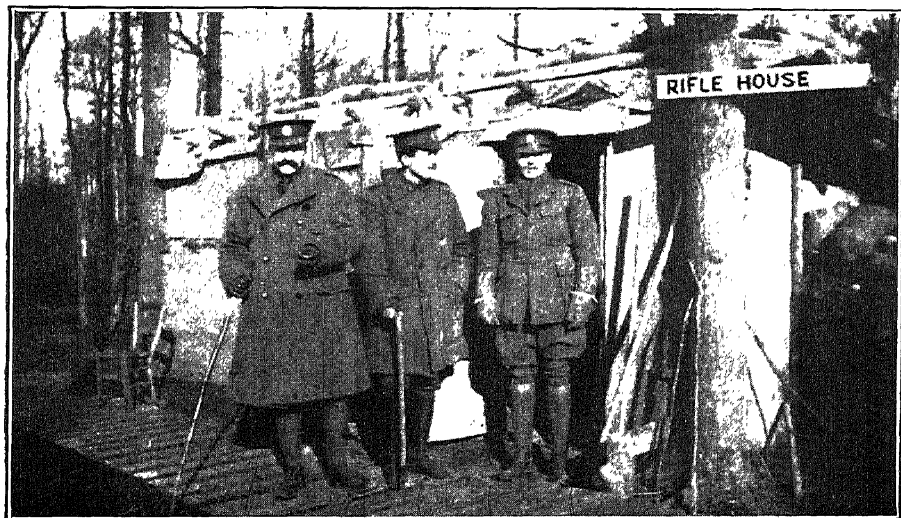
From the very beginning of the action misfortune was experienced. Captain Morgan-Grenville, at the head of the assaulting platoons, was shot dead immediately. His men, unchecked by heavy rifle and machine gun fire—for the enemy defences were quite unharmed by the British artillery—charged the German Houses and captured the two nearest our line. But the supporting platoon in moving forward from the edge of the wood was caught in the fire from our own artillery and brought to a standstill. On the right the attack was held up at the line of a fence just beyond Second German House. On the left the attackers were checked by mud and shell holes, and completely broken up by the combination of heavy machine gun and rifle fire from their front, and "shorts" from their own artillery behind. In an attempt to find touch with the Somerset Light Infantry on the left, the officer in charge, 2nd Lieutenant A. S. L. Daniell, and the small party with him were killed. The "house parties," however, were established on the first objective; and Captain Micklem had his machine guns in action in the Second German House. An hour after the beginning of the attack, therefore, there was one platoon in touch with the Hampshires on the right; the original supporting platoon was working up a German communication trench near the road by which the attackers had advanced; there was the remnant of a platoon holding the road that runs north from German House, but suffering from hostile machine gun fire; and there was a body of men about a platoon strong, together with the machine guns, holding the captured houses. Beyond this position it was impossible to advance for want of covering fire and by reason of the state of the ground. Rifleman A. Moore won the D.C.M. and the Medal of St. George 4th Class for bringing up ammunition six times to enable the garrison to hold out. An attempt to organize a renewal of the attack under Captain Prittie, the Battalion second-in-command, was only productive of the death of that most gallant officer. Reinforcement could only be carried out at the price of heavy casualties.

Just at about this time Captain Riley of "A" Company and Captain Micklem, both wounded, came into Battalion Headquarters on their way back to the dressing-station; and Captain Bernard, who had gone forward to make a personal reconnaissance, came back with his report. All these

* He enlisted in 1914 on the outbreak of war, and joined the Fifth Battalion at Minster.



GERMAN HOUSE.



RIFLE HOUSE.

officers agreed that further progress was impossible since the enemy earth-works had been left intact by the bombardment. They were further of opinion that, although reinforcements could doubtless be sent forward at a prohibitive cost, the firing line was sufficiently dense to hold the ground gained. A continuous line had now been established by the action of Lieutenant F. W. L. Gull of "A" Company, who had moved forward two platoons from the edge of the wood in touch with the Hampshires, and had linked up with "I" Company, whose line passed forward through Second German House and thence along the road northwards to the Somersets' trenches. In this position the enemy seemed prepared for the moment to leave the British undisturbed, so long as no movement took place. The smallest movement drew a hail of fire. The First Battalion in fact was up against what were later to be known as "machine gun nests" in "strong-points"; and in these circumstances Colonel Seymour reported as follows to the 11th Brigade:—

"Present information, our line hung up just E. of Second House. Unless strong offensive possible on our right would suggest demolishing houses and returning to original line."

On the left of the Brigade front the Somerset Light Infantry had accomplished their lesser task of capturing the enemy's front line. The Brigadier ordered both battalions to hold their gains in touch with each other, demolishing any houses (this referred to the First Battalion) or enemy defences, whilst a parapeted trench was being made just inside the edge of the wood so as to deny the whole wood to the enemy. The covering troops (i.e. the attacking platoons) were to retire on Hunter Avenue (the support line) before daybreak—the old front line being held by the existing garrison, and the new trench by "a few good men to deny it to the enemy."

These orders were carried out before morning. But the First Battalion also retained and fortified German House as a "souvenir" of an operation that had cost it altogether three officers and twenty-three other ranks killed and three officers and forty-two other ranks wounded.*

The
Fourth Battalion
arrives.

The Fourth Battalion from Dagshai disembarked at Devonport and proceeded to Magdalen Hill Camp, Winchester, on November 19th. Here were concentrating the troops to make up the 27th Division, under the command of Maj.-Gen. T. D'O. Snow, C.B., who had been invalided home from the 4th Division during the retreat from Le Cateau. The Fourth Battalion, to-

* *Killed* : Captains Prittie and Morgan-Grenville: 2nd-Lieutenant Daniell.
Wounded : Captains Riley and Micklem: 2nd-Lieutenant Baird.

gether with the 2nd Bn. K.S.L.I. and the 3rd and 4th Bns. 60th, were at once constituted into an emergency Brigade (later to be known as the 80th Brigade) under the temporary command of Colonel G. H. Thesiger, C.B., C.M.G., commanding the Fourth Battalion, in the absence of a Brigadier. Next day the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry was added to the 80th Brigade, and two days later Brigadier-General Hon. C. G. Fortescue, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., late of the Rifle Brigade, assumed command. As many as could be spared of the officers and men of the battalions from India were sent on short leave. Fitting out with new rifles and equipment and warm clothing was hurried on. Brigade and Divisional route marches were practised to harden the men after the sea voyage. They were inspected by the King on the 16th December, and on December 20th marched to Southampton and embarked for Havre. The passage of the troops was only made eventful by an attempt of the landing authorities to entrain them direct from the boat—an experiment attended by a considerable measure of discomfort for the men owing to congestion in the sheds, but avowedly satisfactory to the authorities, who must therefore be supposed to have detected no inconvenience in the unshipment of waggons on one wharf and the poles with which to draw them on another a mile away. The stevedores gave proof of their concern in winning the war by striking work and leaving the officers of the Division to man the donkey engines. But, by drawing attention sharply to the insufficiency of the shed accommodation, the passage of the 27th Division was indirectly beneficial to future arrivals. On the 23rd December the 80th Brigade was concentrated in billets in the quaint old-world villages in the neighbourhood of Blaringhem near St. Omer—the Fourth Battalion being in Blaringhem itself.

Christmas 1914 and the truce that it brought along the front, with its flavour of the medieval prohibition of fighting on Sunday, have formed the subject of many a writer. There is little to add from the experiences of the Rifle Brigade. The three Battalions in the line, like the rest of the British Army, met the enemy in No-man's-land; exchanged the "souveneer" so precious to the heart of the Private Rifleman; smoked German cigars and gave "gaspers" in return: speculated with philosophically minded Teutons upon the futility of the whole thing, and upon the "rumness" of talking together to-day and killing each other to-morrow; passed Boxing Day in the traditional spirit of sentimentality; and resumed the war hammer and tongs on the 27th. On the First Battalion front a curious document, proposing a formal armistice on the 31st for the purpose of burying the dead, and signed "Acting General Command," was handed to a stretcher bearer during the truce; but the Battalion, having found the truce "very useful for consolidating the position on the edge of the wood gained on the

19th," received the proposal coldly and nothing came of it. On the Third Battalion front, as its Diary records, "not the least interesting feature was a German juggler who drew a large crowd of Riflemen and Germans in the middle of No-man's-land." In the dumbfounding unexpectedness of the truce it would not have surprised anyone very greatly if the German juggler had turned out to be a modern Pied Piper and had led away a hypnotized crowd of friends and enemies into the blue, determining the war for want of troops. . . . The Fourth Battalion having spent its Christmas under the very walls of G.H.Q. was more prosaically occupied, with other units of the Division, in digging a reserve trench system east of St. Omer and between Arques and Aire. On the last day of the year Colonel Thesiger, Major J. Harington and two N.C.O.'s. went up to the trenches of the 9th Brigade (3rd Division) for a twenty-four hours "Cook's Tour." On the front of the other three Battalions the old year went out quietly.

Thus at the end of 1914 all the regular Battalions of the Rifle Brigade were in the theatre of war. The Fifth and Sixth (Special Reserve) were at their war stations on the Isle of Sheppey in the Thames Estuary,—the Fifth at Minster and Eastchurch, and the Sixth at Sheerness and Queenborough—hard at their work of providing reinforcements to fill the gaps in the fighting line. And there were forming, in the new armies in England, ten Service Battalions who were destined to show themselves by their achievements to be not unworthy of the highest traditions of the Regiment which had given them its name.

●

CHAPTER III

1915

NEUVE CHAPELLE AND ST. ELOI.

THE year 1915 was a year of frustration both for the Allies and for the enemy. Both armies had been trained for a war of movement. The war had become static, and neither side knew how to penetrate the defences of the other and turn it into a war of movement once again.

From the sea-coast of Belgium to the Swiss frontier a staggering line, like the path of a drunkard across a field, reeled over the face of North-West Europe, determined at one or two points by overmastering strategic or political considerations, but for the most part representing the limits which the exhaustion of attackers and the stubbornness of the defenders had combined to fix during the period of movement following upon the retreat, and in the operations that culminated in the First Battle of Ypres. On either side of this line, in every lull in the fighting, defensive systems and trench fortifications, more and more formidable as the engineering resources of both sides were concentrated upon the problem, grew up day by day. The rough and ready shell-pits gave place to spit-locked trenches, which in their turn became whole systems of front line support and reserve, extending continuously for mile upon mile. The improvised trip-wires with pebble-filled tins to give the alarm, became impassable belts of barbed wire entanglement—each many feet in thickness and reinforced with cheveux-de-frises and iron stakes. The use of machine guns in strong points was evolved and became a science almost as elaborate as gunnery. The fearful artillery bombardments were neutralized by deep dug-outs and defence in depth. The massive ferro-concrete "pill-box" which, though it might be thrown bodily off its foundations by a direct hit, was impervious to penetration by the heaviest shells, came as a reply to the artillery tactics of the barrage followed by infantry, and paralyzed attack after attack. It is only fair to say that the credit for these innovations, except the barrage which was the invention of the Royal Artillery, belonged to the Germans. But if we had to learn trench-warfare from Germany, it was by British brains that the means of breaking through was discovered; and the tank was

destined, in the end, to prove the solution of what had seemed an impasse for more than two years.

It may not at first be realized how important in the history of a Regiment is a thorough appreciation of these conditions, and of the difficulty experienced in coping with them. In truth, however, justice cannot be done to the work of the Regular Battalions in those early days, except attention be drawn to the impossibility of performing some of the tasks they were set to do. By way of illustration, it took months of carnage and fruitless sacrifice to teach the lesson pronounced by *The Times*, as a comment on the battle of Neuve Chapelle :—

“ The whole experience of this war has gone to show that infantry cannot advance against machine guns, defended by barbed wire entanglements. . . . A great general has truly said that two men with a machine gun can hold up a brigade.”

What at first sight appears the paucity of the achievements of the Regulars in 1915, in comparison with the deeds of later years, might seem to indicate a failure of leadership on the part of regimental officers or want of dash on the part of the men, if the writer failed to show beyond any possibility of dispute that, in the circumstances, the miracle was that they succeeded in advancing at all.

The early part of the year 1915 was uneventful for any of the Battalions of the Rifle Brigade : indeed upon the whole British front there were, before March, but a local action at Givenchy on January 25th and a series of small engagements at Cuinchy beginning a few days later. The British Expeditionary Force by now, was no longer the “ little army ” of Mons and Le Cateau. Already before the end of the Aisne, a third Corps had been added. The move north synchronized with the formation of a fourth, completed by the arrival of the 8th Division (with the Second Battalion) in November. Meanwhile the Cavalry Division had been expanded into a corps of cavalry under General Allenby ; and the Indian Corps, under Lieut.-Gen. Sir J. Willcocks, was already in the field, followed on the 18th December by the Indian Cavalry Corps, and a few days later by the Fifth British Corps made up of the 27th and 28th Divisions—in the former of which the Fourth Battalion was included. A number of Territorial battalions, sent overseas individually, were attached as fifth battalions to regular brigades—the London Rifle Brigade, for instance, was attached to the same brigade (11th) as the First Battalion. By the end of 1914, Sir John French had divided his command into two armies, the First under Sir Douglas Haig, and the Second under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. Before long a third army was added. Before the end of 1915 there was a fourth ;

and finally the British Expeditionary Force in France (quite apart from the armies in other theatres of war) consisted of five armies made up of twenty-two army corps and the cavalry corps, each comprising from three to five divisions, together with an Australian Corps and a Canadian Corps, each of five divisions, a New Zealand Division (containing the New Zealand Rifle Brigade), five Brigades of the Royal Flying Corps (later the Royal Air Force), five Brigades of Tanks; and a miscellany of G.H.Q. and Army troops, artillery of all calibres, gas services, special companies of Royal Engineers—in all nearer two than one and a half million men in arms. . . .

The four Battalions in Trench Warfare. We left three of the Regular Battalions of the Rifle Brigade settling down to trench warfare—the First at Ploegsteert Wood; the Second at Fauquissart, opposite the Aubers Ridge; the Third at Porte Egal Farm (Armentières). The Fourth Battalion, newly arrived with the 27th Division, was still in a back area, digging the St. Omer defences. All Battalions spent the months of January and February with hardly a break to the monotony of the trenches. The Fourth Battalion came into the line on January 6th, taking over from the French near St. Eloi, some six miles north of the trenches of the First Battalion. The weather bore severely upon men fresh from India. By the 20th the casualty list showed three killed, seven wounded, and two hundred and seventeen down with trench-feet, from which the majority recovered speedily. By the middle of February the Battalion had absorbed nearly six hundred reinforcements, the toll of the Flanders mud. Five D.C.M.s were, however, won during those two months—one each by Sergeant G. Pearce, Rifleman J. Bradford and Rifleman E. J. Latham of “B” Company for rescuing wounded from No-man’s-land in bright moonlight under heavy fire, the fourth by Rifleman R. Griffiths for gallant reconnaissance of the enemy trenches, and the fifth by Sergt.-Major W. Miller, for gallantry in bringing up ammunition. Although the conditions of trench life were wearisomely monotonous in fatigue and bad weather, there was no relaxation of activity. The Bavarian Corps, which held this part of the enemy front, was full of fight. The opposing trenches were within bombing distance of each other and bombing was incessant. Rifle fire went on all night. The enemy was unremitting in sapping and mining; and there were frequent local attacks. The enemy moreover had the advantage of position, for the British line ran along the slope below the Germans.

Meanwhile the First Battalion worked away at German House, and continued to improve the breastworks in the wood, spending alternately three days in the line and three days in billets at Ploegsteert or Armentières (“where baths were available”). Company-Sergeant-Major W. Halliwell

won the Military Cross and Sergeant B. Daldry the D.C.M., both for consistent good work. During March there was a reorganization of the line, the Battalion eventually moving about a mile to St. Yves on the northern outskirts of the wood. It was a vexing time, as anyone familiar with trench life will readily understand, for "there was a continual stream of orders and counter-orders for moves and readjustments of the line." Actually on one occasion the baggage started, but was recalled twelve hours later.

The Second Battalion, in the Laventie salient, found a foe, even more stubborn than the Germans, in the water that pitilessly invaded the trenches and flooded them. But luckily, the attention of the enemy was equally monopolized with the same problem, for he made no attempt to disturb working parties. Even January 27th was quiet, "in spite of its being the Kaiser's birthday." On February 1st, Lieutenant T. P. Pilcher ("A" Company) on patrol, found the German advanced trenches still full of water only. "The Union Jack which he had planted the previous night on the enemy's barricade was still flying." Encouraged by this evidence of moral superiority another patrol decorated the same barricade with an Iron Cross. This was too much! The enemy's patrols became "more enterprising"; and they removed it. With the Third Battalion the most important occurrence was a move from Porte Egal Farm to "a very bad bit of trenches full of water near Houplines." Riflemen W. J. T. Bristow and A. E. Holton, perhaps as a protest against the stagnation of the war in their sector, crawled out one night (February 3rd) through the enemy wire, and scattered a German working party with hand grenades, both winning the D.C.M.

**A Regimental
Bereavement.**

On February 20th the whole Regiment, and especially the Second Battalion, suffered a grievous personal loss. Brig.-Gen. J. E. Gough, V.C., C.M.G., Chief-of-Staff to Sir Douglas Haig, was a pattern of what a Rifleman and a Soldier should be. He was, in addition, possessed of one of the most vigorous and original minds in the whole British Army. No one who knew him would have been in the least surprised had "Johnnie" Gough risen to be Commander-in-Chief. On February 20th, with the plans for Neuve Chapelle in his mind, he paid a visit to the trenches of the Second Battalion (one of the units destined to take part in the operation), for the dual purpose of meeting old friends and of making a reconnaissance of the Aubers Ridge—the high ground that rises out of the level plain stretching between Bethune and Armentières. Walking with Colonel Stephens along the Rue Tilleloy, a couple of hundred yards behind the front line, he stopped with his field glasses by a gap in the houses, near the Headquarters of "A" Company, which he had commanded in the South African War. There was an eagle-eyed German sniper on the Aubers Ridge, twelve hundred yards away. The

slight movement betrayed the target. There was the sudden hiss of a bullet ; the distant snap of a rifle ; and General Gough's plans and career were both at an end. They carried him to his old company mess to die ; * and the Second Battalion had something to avenge when it went into battle a fortnight later.

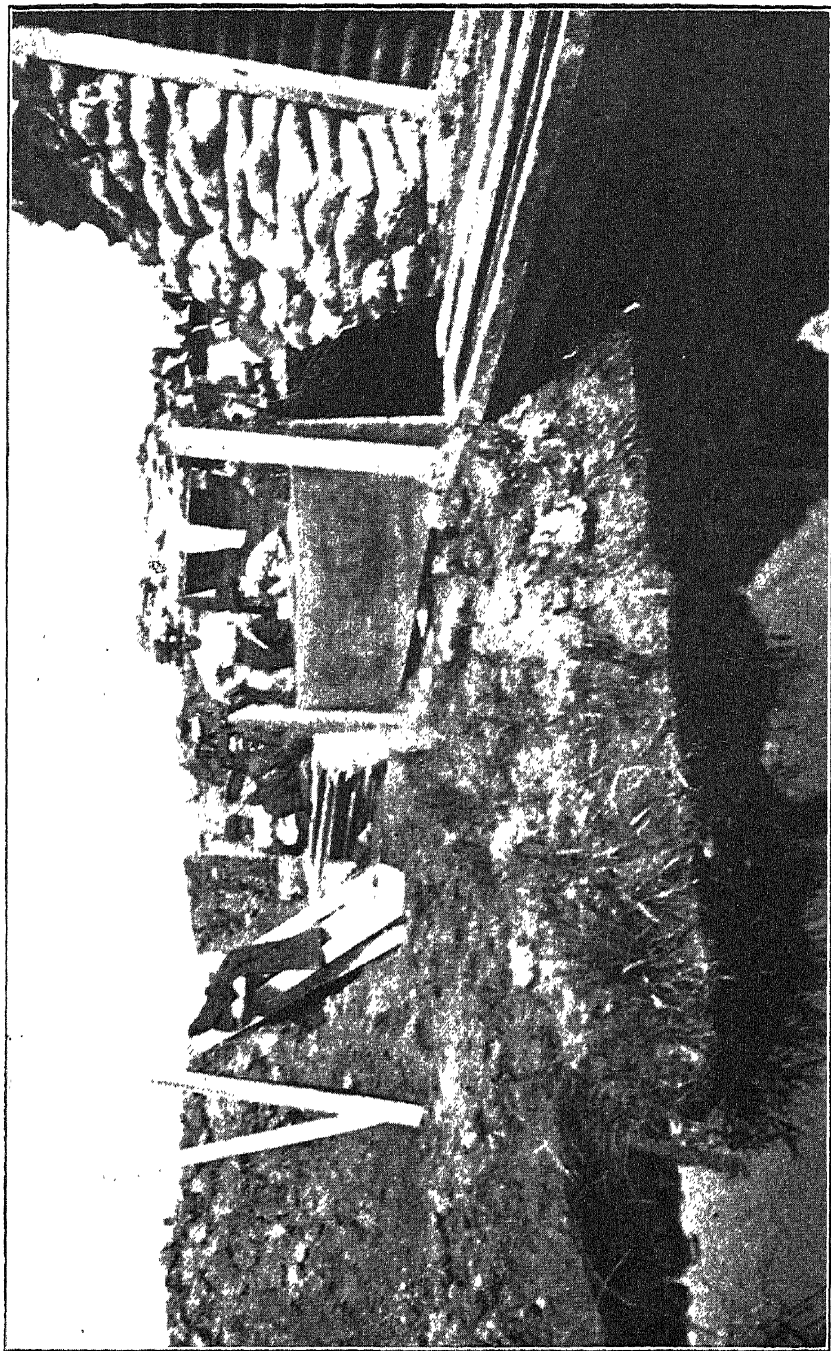
The decision to fight the battle of Neuve Chapelle was taken by Sir John French at the strong instance of Sir Douglas Haig. It is probable that in the whole history of warfare there has rarely been an operation projected of so promising a character on paper ; nor one attended by so many disastrous disappointments in the carrying out. In the first place, on the thirteen-mile front of the First Army, † held by seven divisions, there was opposed to the British but one German corps of two divisions. Secondly, on the whole British front the enemy had no more than two and a half army corps or roughly one-third of the men and half the guns of the British Expeditionary Force. Neither side had any extensive reserves ; but the German High Command was much preoccupied with the Russian front for the reinforcement of which the Western front had been extensively depleted ; and from the known dispositions of the meagre reserves of Prince Rupprecht's Sixth Army, it seemed certain that not more than a brigade could be brought up by the end of the first day, nor greatly more than a division by the end of the second. There was every justification, on the score of numbers, for Sir Douglas Haig's expressed opinion that " more favourable circumstances in which to take the offensive could scarcely be hoped for." Unfortunately, however, other considerations than numbers are of paramount importance in modern warfare. The Germans had an overwhelming preponderance of machine guns ; and for their one piece of artillery to the British two, they had an unlimited supply of ammunition. The state of the British ammunition supply will become apparent as the narrative proceeds.

The strategic objective of Sir Douglas Haig's plan was to establish the First Army across the Aubers Ridge between Rouges Bancs and the outskirts of Illies and, if the break-through should be sufficiently complete, to push forward the cavalry into the open country behind the German lines.

The operation was to be in two stages—first the breaking of the German line on a relatively short frontage, secondly the extension of the advance along a two corps front, and its exploitation if possible along the whole front of the First Army. For the first stage—the break-through—the line in front of Neuve Chapelle was chosen because of its configuration. Against the garrison of the enemy's defences in that locality—one battalion of the 16th Infantry Regiment and two companies of the 11th Jäger Battalion—Sir Douglas Haig was about to launch two entire divisions. So gigantic a

* He was buried by the Battalion at Estaires—" A " Company providing the firing party.

† Between the La Bassée Canal and Bois Grenier.



"A" COMPANY, 2nd BATTALION AT FAUQUISSART CROSS ROADS, NEAR LAVENTIE.
1914-1915.

superiority in numbers could hardly have failed to operate as an additional encouragement to the fighting men, and some such thought seems to have been in the mind of the Army Commander, for he issued a special order, on the day before the battle, informing his army of this striking disparity. It is typical of the confusion that was to reign during the battle that this order was not communicated to the troops engaged until after the advance had been made.

The 8th Division of the IV Corps (Sir Henry Rawlinson) and the Meerut Division of the Indian Corps (Sir J. Willcocks) were chosen for the first stage—the attack on the village.* The 8th Division was to attack with two Brigades, the 25th and 23rd. The Meerut Division was to employ the Gharwal Brigade. Prior to the advance the line was held, on the Indian Corps front by the Bareilly Brigade, and on the IV Corps front by the 24th Brigade. On March 2nd, in preparation for the coming battle, the Second Battalion was withdrawn from the trenches at Fauquissart, handing over to troops of the 7th Division. It marched to La Gorgue, just south of Estaires, for a week's training. The officers took the opportunity of visiting the line in front of Neuve Chapelle, to familiarize themselves with the ground—a precaution rendered doubly necessary by the nature of the coming attack.†

Neuve Chapelle.

Neuve Chapelle is a small village on dead-level ground lying about midway between the towns of Armentières and Bethune. It had been the scene of a bitter struggle in October 1914, during the progress of the battle of La Bassée. The Rue Tilleloy, as the crooked main road between the towns is called, passes through the village in the form of the principal street, crossing the Estaires—La Bassée road on the outskirts of Richebourg l'Avoué. About half a mile before it reaches Neuve Chapelle, however, in the neighbourhood of a large farm known as the Moated Grange,‡ it is joined by a switch road connecting with the Estaires—La Bassée road at the hamlet of Pont Logy, about a mile nearer to Estaires than the main road-junction. The British front in March 1915, having run more or less parallel with the Rue Tilleloy and anything from two hundred to five hundred yards to the east of it, from Picantin as far as the grounds of the Moated Grange, and a few yards into them, suddenly turned back at right angles (leaving the actual farm buildings in No-man's-land) and crossed the Rue Tilleloy a couple of hundred yards short of its junction with the Pont Logy switch. The switch road bends sharply back at this point forming an elbow. The

* This arrangement had the disadvantage of involving the employment of two Corps Commanders in what might have been done by one. Co-ordination suffered in the later stages of the battle.

† The reader is advised to consult the Maps in Volume III of The Official History.

‡ Its French name is La Ferme Vanbesien.

trench line swinging forward again, crossed the switch at the elbow, ran east of it as far as the Estaires—La Bassée road, followed that (exclusive) to the junction with the Rue Tilleloy south of Neuve Chapelle,* and thence ran almost due south to Festubert and Givenchy.

The village of Neuve Chapelle may be said, therefore, to lie within an obtuse angle made at Pont Logy by the road junction. Two roads, other than the Rue Tilleloy, lead into the village from the Pont Logy switch, and one runs into it from the Estaires—La Bassée road. There are orchards in the northern part of the village, which is backed to the east by a partly artificial watercourse called the Rivière des Laies, that runs between Armentières and the network of watercourses flowing out of the Rivière La Loïse and criss-crossing the district north-east of Bethune. Further still to the east of Neuve Chapelle there is the Bois du Biez, a rectangle of woodland flanked on the western side by a straggling hamlet, known at the north end as La Russe and at the south as Les Brulots. And, immediately behind the wood, the Aubers ridge rises gently out of the plain.

The front system of defences consisted of the usual three lines of trenches lying at anything from one to three hundred yards from the British line. Behind the village there was the old Smith-Dorrien Trench, fought for so stubbornly in 1914. The village itself is well adapted for street fighting. It is covered by the hamlet in front of the Bois du Biez, which is slightly higher than the village, and by the wood itself, out of which the rising ground begins. Furthermore, like many other villages in that region, it is intersected with water-ditches, anything from knee to waist deep, especially in the neighbourhood of Smith-Dorrien Trench. It will have been observed from the foregoing that, by way of compensation, the position could be subjected to converging attacks; and that was precisely the British plan. While the 8th Division, with the 25th Brigade on its right flank, attacked from the Pont Logy switch in the direction of east south-east, the Meerut Division of the Indian Corps was to attack east north-east from the Estaires—La Bassée road.

The 25th Brigade attack was therefore a formidable enterprise. Not only was the greater part of the village within the objective, but the troops had the extremely difficult task of keeping touch with others attacking in a different direction and, to make it harder, attacking from an advanced position. The right flank unit of the 25th Brigade had to bear the brunt of both these difficulties, for the duty of keeping touch fell naturally to that battalion; and in addition the greater part of the village was on its immediate front. The attack was to be in two stages. The Lincolns on the left and the Royal

* This locality, strongly defended, was known as Port Arthur. There is now an estaminet on the site.

Berkshires on the right were to seize the enemy's front line system. The Royal Irish Rifles on the left and the Rifle Brigade on the right were then to pass through in touch with the Indians and capture the village, halting on the further outskirts. It will be seen that the place of honour in the battle was that of the Second Battalion, the right-hand battalion in the attack on the village.

The Lincolns and the Royal Berkshires were to form up in the British front line. Reference has been made to the two roads leading from the Pont Logy switch into the village. On the northernmost of the two—(Sign-post Lane)—which joins the Rue Tilleloy in the northern outskirts of Neuve Chapelle and passes round the village to the neighbourhood of the Bois du Biez, the Royal Irish Rifles were drawn up, in rear of the Lincolns. Astride the southern of these roads, which led past the heap of rubble that was once the church into the very heart of the village, were the assembly trenches of the Rifle Brigade, "A," "B," and "D" Companies on the left, and "C" Company, whose task was to keep touch with the Indians, on the right.

March 10th.
Neuve Chapelle.
The
Second Battalion
in Action.

At 11 p.m. on March 9th the Second Battalion marched down from La Gorgue to its place of assembly, halting on the way at Croix-Barbée for a hot meal. For the first time since their arrival in the forward area, all the officers of the Battalion were together at mess, when they met for this meal in the farm-house parlour. The attack was to be preceded by a thirty-five minute bombardment beginning at 7.30 a.m. on the 10th. The infantry were timed to go over the top at five minutes past eight, at which moment the supporting battalions were to move forward from their trenches, in readiness to attack through the first objective at 8.35 a.m. In the early hours of the morning, before daylight, the Second Battalion was in its place on either side of the road into the village, equipped in what came to be known as "battle order," which is to say in marching order, with the haversack substituted for the pack.

At 8.5 a.m., according to time-table, the artillery lifted from the German front line system on to the village; the Royal Berkshires and the Lincolns rushed the enemy trenches and the supporting battalions began to move forward, the Second Battalion advancing by companies in column of half platoons, with "A" Company (Captain S. A. Sherston) leading on the left of the road, and "C" Company (Captain R. O. Bridgeman) by itself on the right. Almost immediately "C" Company commander observed a white flag in some trenches a couple of hundred yards away to the right, between the Second Battalion and the Indians. He detached some of his men, hurried with them to the spot and captured thirty-three of the enemy. Rejoining the Battalion with his party the same officer early found touch

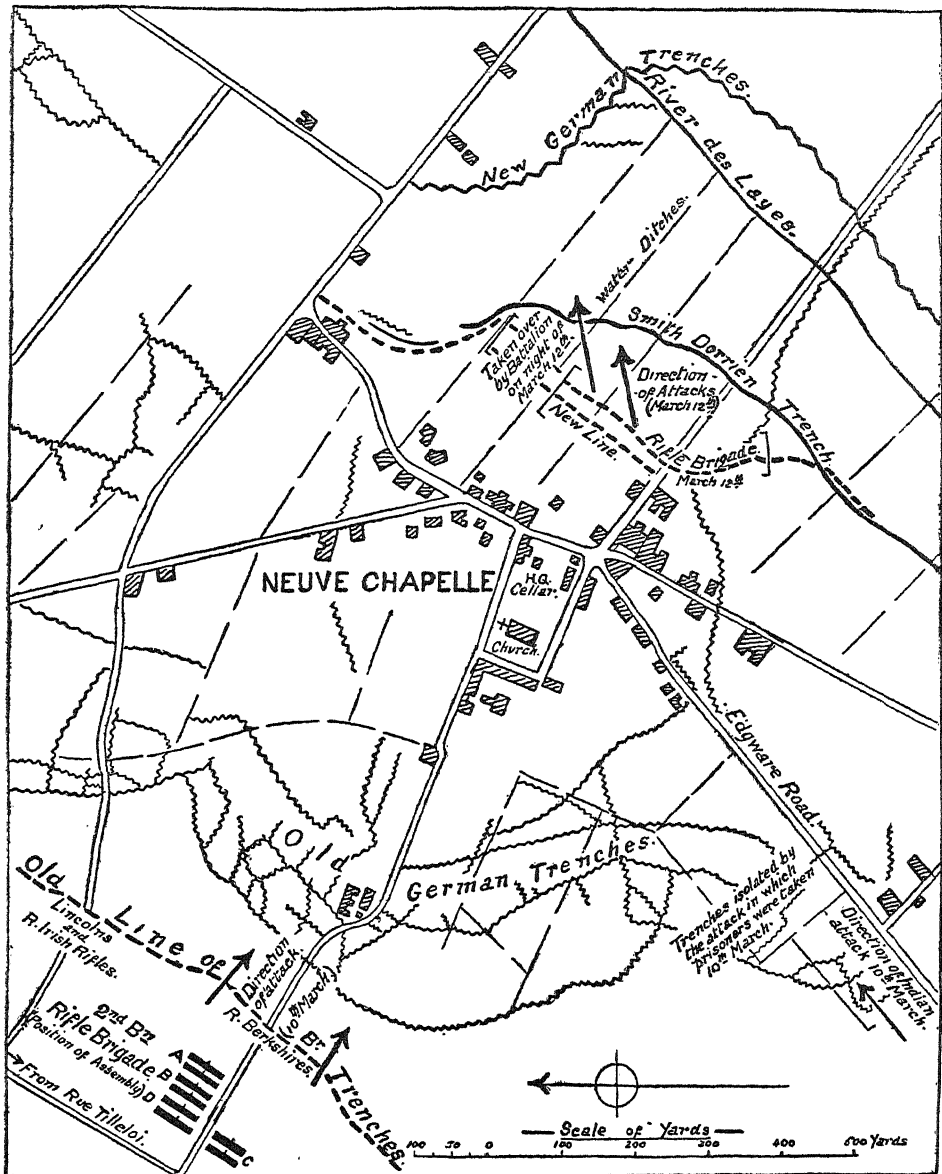
with the Gurkhas in the village, thus ascertaining that the flank was secure. By 8.35 a.m. the Battalion was in position behind the Royal Berkshires ; and, at that moment, as the artillery barrage lifted and moved forward, charged into the village. By 8.50 a.m. the main body was up to the Rue Tilleloy, the main street of the village, and scouts and bombers were pushed out in advance as far as Smith-Dorrien Trench which, on the extreme south of the village, was then occupied by " B " Company.* In " mopping up " the village a number of the enemy were killed and some fifty prisoners were taken. The resistance was weak, half-hearted indeed—the resistance of men who were dazed with surprise. The Battalion, with comparatively few casualties, was on its objective in touch on both flanks and in magnificent fighting fettle. There was no sign of any enemy in front. It seemed a golden opportunity to exploit the success. But no advance was possible without agreement from above. The artillery was still firing and the shells were falling just beyond the village. Indeed " A " and " C " Companies, which were lying out covering the remainder of the Battalion as it worked at entrenching the objective, found themselves unpleasantly close to the stationary barrage and, after suffering casualties, were ordered to fall back a little. In these circumstances Colonel Stephens sent back to Brigade Headquarters reporting on the situation and asking to be allowed to make a further advance. But he was told in reply that the left of the line was held up and until that came forward he must stand his ground. In fact the bombardment on the front of the 23rd Brigade had totally failed to cut the wire, and the attacking troops had been literally slaughtered. It is quite possible that had Colonel Stephens been permitted to take his Battalion forward, and had he been supported by the 24th Brigade—in short had the reinforcements been thrown into the gap that had been made, and employed to widen it, the advance might well have cut in behind the flank that was holding out and necessitated a German withdrawal. For there were as yet no German reserves to meet such a manœuvre, far less to counter-attack ; and the only available enemy troops (the remaining two companies of the German right battalion in the Neuve Chapelle sector, who were feverishly striving to improvise a second line of defence) would have been brushed aside leaving nothing—actually nothing between the British and the Aubers Ridge.

The order to stand fast was definite, and the Rifle Brigade accordingly continued to entrench themselves on the objective, in conjunction with the Royal Irish Rifles, building breastworks of broken masonry—for the ground

* Captain R. C. Burton, the company commander, was killed on the way across. His place was taken temporarily by Lieutenant E. H. Leigh. Major Harrison assumed command later in Smith-Dorrien Trench.

THE BATTLE OF NEUVE CHAPELLE.

10th March, 1915.



THE CAPTURE OF THE VILLAGE BY THE SECOND BATTALION.

(Map copied from Second Battalion War Diary.)

was too water-logged for digging and Smith-Dorrien Trench was uninhabitable. They were considerably harassed and suffered a number of casualties from enemy field guns just north of the Bois du Biez, and from machine-gun fire from the hamlet. The German gunners had fled at the beginning of the action, but observing that the British stood fast they gathered courage to return to their guns and opened fire over open sights at less than a thousand yards. A mountain gun was brought up into the village to reply, but was instantly put out of action, with its whole team, by one well-directed shell. At 5.30 p.m. the Indians (Dehra Dun Brigade) went forward to the western outskirts of the Bois du Biez but, finding it occupied and learning from a prisoner of the arrival of reinforcements, decided, in view of the standstill of the 8th Division, to fall back to a position along the Rivière des Laies.* A succession of attacks by the 24th Brigade and the 7th Division on the left had carried the advance forward to the general line :—the road junction south-west of Chapigny—the outskirts of Mauquissait—the eastern corner of the road triangle immediately north of Neuve Chapelle—along the breastworks built by the 25th Brigade east of the village—Smith-Dorrien Trench—the Rivière des Laies—the old British front line south-east of Port Arthur. But misconceptions and delays had done their worst. Every one had spent the day waiting for some one else. And the advance, when at last it could be begun, was all too soon checked by darkness. The enemy, on the other hand, made no move. His reserves, which were hurrying to the battlefield, had not yet assembled. No counter-attack developed and the night passed quietly.

The Second Battalion's casualties for the day, many of which were occasioned in consolidating after the battle, were Captain H. V. B. Byatt, the medical officer, killed at the very beginning of the action, Captain R. C. Burton ("B" Company) died of wounds received in crossing No-man's-land; Captain Verney ("D" Company) and Lieutenant V. F. Bulkeley-Johnston ("C" Company) wounded; and one hundred and twelve N.C.O.s and Riflemen killed and wounded. Lieutenant Leigh handed over command of "B" Company to Major Harrison and Lieutenant R. C. Mansel took command of "D." The new medical officer proved to be the son of Major-General J. Maclean who had commanded the Second Battalion in the "seventies." Lieutenant I. C. Maclean proved himself a true son of the Regiment, for he at once earned his Military Cross for his gallantry in tending the wounded under fire and was in addition mentioned in despatches. "He was marvellous," says an officer of the Battalion.

* "The tragedy of this standstill cannot be too greatly emphasized," writes an officer who was present. "There was nothing to stop us and the troops were in wonderful fettle and dying to get on. The delay cost us dear later."

March 11th was a day of lost opportunities. In the early morning it was found that the enemy had begun a new trench beyond the Rivière des Laies and parallel to it, which, on the extreme left front of the Battalion, swung forward across the river and met the road that runs from the northern outskirts of Neuve Chapelle to Mauquissait. With a proper bombardment it was not too late to resume the attack, for the position though wired and strongly held was not yet completely entrenched. During the morning orders came up for the Second Battalion to withdraw on relief by the 2nd Bn. West Yorkshire Regt. of the 23rd Brigade, and to form up in rear with the remainder of the 25th Brigade in reserve to the 24th Brigade attack. No relief, however, took place. By some inexplicable mistake when the remainder of the 25th Brigade went out, the Second Battalion was left unrelieved in its trenches—a fact that was to spread confusion throughout the whole right flank as the day went on. It was intended to rectify the error later in the morning, but there was an alarm of a counter-attack; and it was then decided that the Rifle Brigade had better remain where they were—the Commanding Officer being directed that should a counter-attack develop, he was to attack in his turn. There was, however, no sign or suggestion of a counter-attack. Colonel Stephens accordingly replied in that sense and suggested, as a counter proposal, that he should attack the field-gun positions on his front, with the support of the remainder of the 25th Brigade. He was told that he was to make no attack whatever without orders.

Meanwhile a serious misunderstanding had arisen on the right. Although the Second Battalion (which, despite its position in the fore-front, was considered technically to be in reserve) had been forbidden to advance—attacks were supposed to be in progress all along the line. On the right the Dehra Dun Brigade was to attack the Bois du Biez; but as its position on the Rivière des Laies was in front of the troops on its left, its advance was timed in relation to the coming into line of the 8th Division. By this was intended to be understood the advance of the 24th Brigade which was attacking in a north-easterly direction from the other side of the village of Neuve Chapelle, and which owing once again to the failure of the bombardment, had been held up since early morning, in front of the new German line in the neighbourhood of the Mauquissait road. But the Dehra Dun Brigade Commander, seeing the Second Battalion in the front line on his left, not unnaturally concluded that this was the 8th Division unit that was to attack with him, and waited an hour for it to move. He then visited Colonel Stephens, discovered that the Battalion had received no orders to advance, and returned to his Brigade in a state of bewilderment. So the

morning dragged on, with only one thing certain, that the Germans were working like beavers to establish themselves impregably in their new line.

In the afternoon a fresh effort to advance was ordered to begin at 2.15 p.m. No proper allowance of time was made for communicating the order through the various formations to the troops that were to carry it out—with the consequence that the artillery bombardment was over before the infantry received their orders to go forward. The Indians on the right were once again ordered to attack the Bois du Biez. Once more their movements were related to those of the 8th Division. Once more it was not specified what Brigade of the Division was meant. Once more the presence of the Second Battalion wrought confusion in the mind of the Dehra Dun Brigade Commander. Seeing the Riflemen stationary in their trenches, he sent a staff officer to find out when they proposed to attack. But by now Colonel Stephens had received the reply to his request for permission to attack the field guns; and the dumbfounded Brigade-Major of the Indians was shown a document which, so far from ordering an advance, directed that no attack by the Battalion could be sanctioned. The Indian Brigadier, in disgust, cancelled his whole enterprise. Meanwhile the 8th Divisional Commander had decided, in view of the failure of the 24th Brigade, to throw in the 25th Brigade; and, shortly after the departure of the Indian Staff officer, General Lowry-Cole, the 25th Brigade Commander, arrived at the Second Battalion Headquarters to arrange for the Battalion, in conjunction with the Dehra Dun Brigade, to make the very attack that Colonel Stephens had suggested earlier in the day. He learned, on arrival, that the Dehra Dun Brigade attack was now abandoned; and after a personal reconnaissance of the position decided that an attack unsupported on the right would be useless.

March 12th.
The Second Bat-
talion resumes
the Attack.

At 1 a.m. on March 12th orders to the Second Battalion to resume the attack at last arrived. There was to be a preliminary bombardment, and the advance would begin at 7 a.m. Two hours after the receipt of these orders, the Indians on the right who, for thirty-six hours, had held the advanced trench on the line of the Rivière des Laies, which admirably supported the flank of the Second Battalion for its further advance, sent word that they were leaving the forward position and falling back to Smith-Dorrien Trench. Two hours later (at about 4.45 a.m.) the enemy at last delivered his counter-attack and was heavily repulsed. "This was about the finest shooting the Battalion had during the whole war. There must have been about 500 dead on the Battalion front." * The hours passed and the Riflemen prepared for their own advance at 7 a.m. They listened in vain for the promised bombardment. Not a gun fired. Within so short

* Captain Chichester-Constable.

a time of zero hour that it was only possible to communicate with the companies two minutes before they were due to advance, orders were received cancelling the attack and substituting another at 10.30 a.m. At 9 a.m. a second counter-attack by the enemy failed even more miserably than the first. 10.30 a.m. came, and with it orders postponing the British attack till 12.30 p.m. when it would be preceded by a bombardment beginning at noon. The Indians were also to attack again. Colonel Stephens tried to arrange for co-operation ; but their attack was timed for 1 p.m. This is said to have been intended by Sir Douglas Haig to give time for the 8th Division to capture a strong point on the La Russe road before the attack was launched on the Bois du Biez—but to the troops on the spot it really seemed as though a paralysing inability to co-ordinate was somewhere vitiating the whole enterprise. By 12.30 p.m. when the Rifle Brigade with the Royal Irish Rifles on their left, endeavoured to advance, after a somewhat thin bombardment, all chance of success except by a fully prepared attack had been lost. The enemy, firmly rooted in his new trench, had got up his machine guns.

Moreover, despite the protests of Colonel Stephens, the attack was ordered to be made full into the apex of the re-entrant formed by the new trench, which imposed upon the attackers the additional handicap of having to cross diagonally over the lines of deep dykes that run into the village from the Rivière des Laies. This was in order to conform to the plan for a general advance in a north-easterly direction ; but from his first-hand knowledge of the ground Colonel Stephens had asked to be allowed to attack parallel to the dykes at right angles to the river. “ A ” Company (Captain Sherston) and “ B ” Company (Lieutenant Leigh) were chosen for the operation, the line being led by Major Harrison. No sooner had the leading lines left the trenches than they were met by a tornado of cross-fire not only from machine guns and rifles in the new trench, but from the field guns north of the Bois du Biez ; from machine guns in the hamlet in front of the wood ; and from the strong point near the bridge on the Neuve Chapelle—La Russe road. Major Harrison and Lieutenant Pilcher (“ A ” Company) were killed immediately, and Lieutenant G. F. Earle (“ A ” Company) was wounded. The leading line withered away. A mere handful, which included Captain Shers-ton and Lieutenant Chichester-Constable of “ A ” Company, and Lieutenants Leigh and Hon. H. R. Hardinge of “ B ” Company, succeeded in covering the bare two hundred yards to the empty Smith-Dorrien Trench. In face of the obvious impossibility of anything human surviving in such conditions, Colonel Stephens ordered the attack to stop ; but not before Lieutenant E. Gilbey (“ C ” Company) had been killed in assisting a wounded man, and the Adjutant, Captain T. J. Fitzherbert-Brockholes, had been mortally wounded.

Then the High Command, which had opposed the attack when there

was a chance of its succeeding, became resolute that it must be pressed home at any cost. This change of attitude was due to a total misconception of the situation, based on faulty information of the results of the morning's attacks further north.* At 4 p.m. Colonel Stephens was sent for and ordered to make a second attack at 5.15 p.m. There was no opportunity to make any plan. By the time he had reached his Battalion with the order it was nearly 5 p.m., and what is described by an eye-witness as "a small and inadequate" artillery demonstration was already in progress. It was now the turn of "C" and "D" Companies. In the spirit of another famous Brigade, "theirs not to reason why," knowing that some one had blundered badly and knowing their task to be humanly impossible, they hurriedly formed up with "D" on the right and "C" on the left, to obey orders. Captain Bridgeman of "C" Company led his men headlong for the machine guns on their left front—the strong point on the La Russe road. He reached Smith-Dorrien Trench and found himself with only Corporal Woolnough and Riflemen Rogers, Carbutt, and Jones left of those who had started with him. The rest of No. 11 and 12 Platoons, which had formed the leading wave (including his subaltern, 2nd Lieutenant R. S. Mason, mortally wounded) had been shot down. Beyond Smith-Dorrien Trench it was impossible to advance, even had there been anyone left with whom to do so. "D" Company on the right found an even more hopeless task to be attempted. There was uncut wire in front of them—their own wire. Company-Sergeant-Major H. Daniels and Corporal C. R. Noble rushed out with wire cutters into the hail of bullets to make a passage by hand. They did so at the cost of Noble's life. Lieutenant Mansel, the Company Commander, started out at the head of his men, and fell seriously wounded. And then Colonel Stephens, intervening once more, stopped the attack, and at nightfall recalled Captain Bridgeman and his party from Smith-Dorrien Trench. Later in the evening Corporal Woolnough was killed and Captain Bridgeman severely wounded.

Further fruitless attacks on other parts of the front, attended by every imaginable complication and mischance, continued until the early hours of the following morning when, satisfied that further progress was unattainable, the Army Commander suspended the operation and ordered the consolidation of the ground that had been gained. So ended a disastrous day of squandered heroism, that cost the Second Battalion eight officers† and

* Official History of the War.

† The total officer casualties during the battle were:—

Killed: Major Harrison, Capt. Fitzherbert-Brockholes, Capt. Byatt, R.A.M.C., Lieut. Pilcher, Lieut. Gilbey.

Died of Wounds: Capt. Burton, 2nd-Lieut. Mason.

Wounded: Capt. Verney, Capt. Bridgeman, Lieut. Bulkeley-Johnson, Lieut. Earle.



CORPORAL C. R. NOBLE, V.C.

some two hundred and fifty other ranks killed and wounded. C.S.M. Daniels and A/Corporal Noble were awarded the Victoria Cross. C.S.M. A. H. Curtis ("C" Company), C.Q.M.S. J. H. Bennett and Rifleman C. J. Sturch ("B" Company), Sergeant A. F. Bellringer ("A" Company) and Rifleman W. G. Hunt ("D" Company) received the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the last named for carrying messages over the open under heavy fire. Sergt.-Major Curtis in addition received the Cross of the Order of St. George, Fourth Class. Corporal Smith and Rifleman Hilliam were awarded the Medal of St. George. From the 13th to the 20th of the month the Battalion remained on the ground it had captured, shelled and sniped "very heavily," especially in the first three days, but "rapidly improving the position." The dead were buried in Neuve Chapelle churchyard.

March 14th.
St. Eloi. The
Fourth Battalion
in a Night Attack.

Meanwhile on March 14th, when the Second Battalion was grappling with the task of consolidating the defences of Neuve Chapelle, the Fourth Battalion, resting in billets at Reninghelst, three miles or so to the south-east of Poperinghe, was suddenly stood to arms and hurried to Dickebusch with the remainder of the 80th Brigade. At 5 p.m. the enemy, after exploding a mine* under the Mound, on the outskirts of St. Eloi, had opened a violent bombardment and had attacked the 82nd Brigade, capturing the defences of St. Eloi and penetrating into the village itself. The 82nd Brigade was hurriedly organizing a counter-attack, and the 80th Brigade (less one battalion lent to the 82nd) was brought forward in close support.

The village of St. Eloi stands at the junction of the Ypres—Messines and Voormezele—Warneton roads, about a mile south-east of Voormezele, on rising ground—a steady slope upward of fifty feet in the mile. Beyond St. Eloi the slope continues to rise another fifty feet to Eikhof Farm, a mile east south-east in the direction of Hollebeke. St. Eloi is in fact on the side of a gentle hill and about half-way up it. The ridge beyond had been in the hands of the enemy since the loss of Hollebeke in 1914, and his front line crossed a little hillock above St. Eloi, just where the road to Eikhof Farm forks away from the main Warneton road. From that point it ran roughly south-west, taking in Piccadilly Farm and the northern edge of the Bois Quarante. On the St. Eloi side of the hillock, not many yards from the road fork, there was a large artificial knoll. This knoll, known as the Mound, stood just inside the St. Eloi defences, which were made up of a series of

* Lieutenant W. H. S. Alston had reported sounds of mining in the neighbourhood of the Mound as early as February. But the report was discredited both by the Royal Engineer and by 27th Divisional H.Q. on the ground that mining was impossible in such a soil. Subsequently after further evidence experts were sent to the spot and reported that mining was possible. An attempt was then made to undermine the enemy position—too late.

forward posts numbered 13 to 22 extending from the vicinity of Piccadilly Farm to the neighbourhood of Shelley Farm ; a succession of supporting trenches sited on either side and in front of the village, including the famous Rifle Brigade Trench which lay to the west of the Ypres—Messines road and some two hundred yards to the south and in advance of St. Eloi ; barricades one behind the other in the village itself ; and a redoubt and two supporting points immediately behind it. The advance of the enemy had given him the Mound, the trench systems that protected the village, and he had penetrated into St. Eloi itself. But he had not advanced beyond.

General Fortescue drew up his Brigade at Kruisstraathoek, with the Fourth Bn. Rifle Brigade extended to the right from the cross roads in the village down the Elzenwalle road ; the P.P.C.L.I. extended to the left from the same point ; the 3rd Bn. 60th in the grounds of Chateau Segard, in rear of the P.P.C.L.I. ; and the 2nd Bn. K.S.L.I. in the road immediately behind the Chateau. Here at 3 a.m. he learned that the 82nd Brigade had failed in its counter-attack, and that it was now the task of the 80th Brigade to restore the situation and recapture the Mound. He accordingly gave orders for the Fourth Battalion to make the main attack, proceeding through Voormezele and St. Eloi by the main road—it was impossible to attack across country owing to the boggy condition of the ground. The Princess Patricia's were to co-operate by pushing along the Voormezele—Oesthoek road and attacking towards St. Eloi from the direction of Shelley Farm, clearing Trenches 19, 20 and 21. In view of the uncertainty of the exact situation Colonel Farquhar of the Canadians was left to choose his own jumping-off place on the spot. When he arrived in position, however, it was so short a time before daylight that he was only able to organize an attack by one company on Trench 19, starting from the breastwork to the left of Shelley Farm. By this time Trench 20 had already been retaken. The 3rd Bn. 60th was detailed to support the P.P.C.L.I. and the 2nd Bn. K.S.L.I. (less one company) was sent in support of the Rifle Brigade.

In accordance with these instructions (packs having been discarded and jam-tin bombs of a rough and ready kind having been issued out earlier in the evening in anticipation) the Fourth Battalion marched up to Voormezele, turned into the St. Eloi road, halted clear of the former village and fixed swords. It was by no means easy to obtain an accurate idea of the situation. At the time of leaving Kruisstraathoek it was believed that Rifle Brigade Trench and K.S.L.I. Trench were both unoccupied by the enemy, and that he had not come in any force farther than the Mound and the forward posts. But information reached the Brigadier soon afterwards that both these important trenches were in the enemy's hands ; and this was hurriedly sent on to Colonel Thesiger who had meanwhile discovered for

himself that St. Eloi was in the enemy's hands. A report reached him that it was impossible to advance beyond Crimean Support Trench (S. 9) some distance in rear of the village. Stragglers had wild stories of the Germans hot on their heels. He therefore moved the Battalion forward as far as Bus House, about five hundred yards short of the village; and halted to allow the P.P.C.L.I. to come up on the left. What follows gives some idea of the counter-offensive power of a battalion, even without artillery support, when resolutely commanded by a skilful soldier.

The P.P.C.L.I. were, as it turned out, blocked on the road in Voor-mezele. The period of darkness remaining before daylight was ebbing fast. It was already 4.30 a.m.; and Colonel Thesiger then decided that if the work was to be done at all, the Fourth Battalion must if necessary do it alone. Leaving "B" Company (Major Harington) in reserve at Bus House under the Second-in-Command, Major A. M. King (to whom he gave instructions that if no orders reached him by 5 a.m. he was to take the detachment back to Dickebusch), he took the remainder of the Battalion forward to the vicinity of S. 9, where a fallen tree across the road made a convenient point from which to despatch the companies on their various tasks. Colonel Thesiger had this advantage in making his plans that the ground was thoroughly known to all his officers and many of his men. "D" Company (Captain H. B. M. Pryce) was first sent off to work round the south of the village and recapture Rifle Brigade Trench. After a delay of fifteen minutes to allow of this being done without an alarm, "C" Company (Captain M. B. Selby-Smyth) was to advance by platoons, clear the barricades and, pushing through the village, attack the Mound and re-take it together with the old front line. "A" Company (Lieutenant L. C. Stopford Sackville) was to follow "C" into the village and "mop-up" the houses.

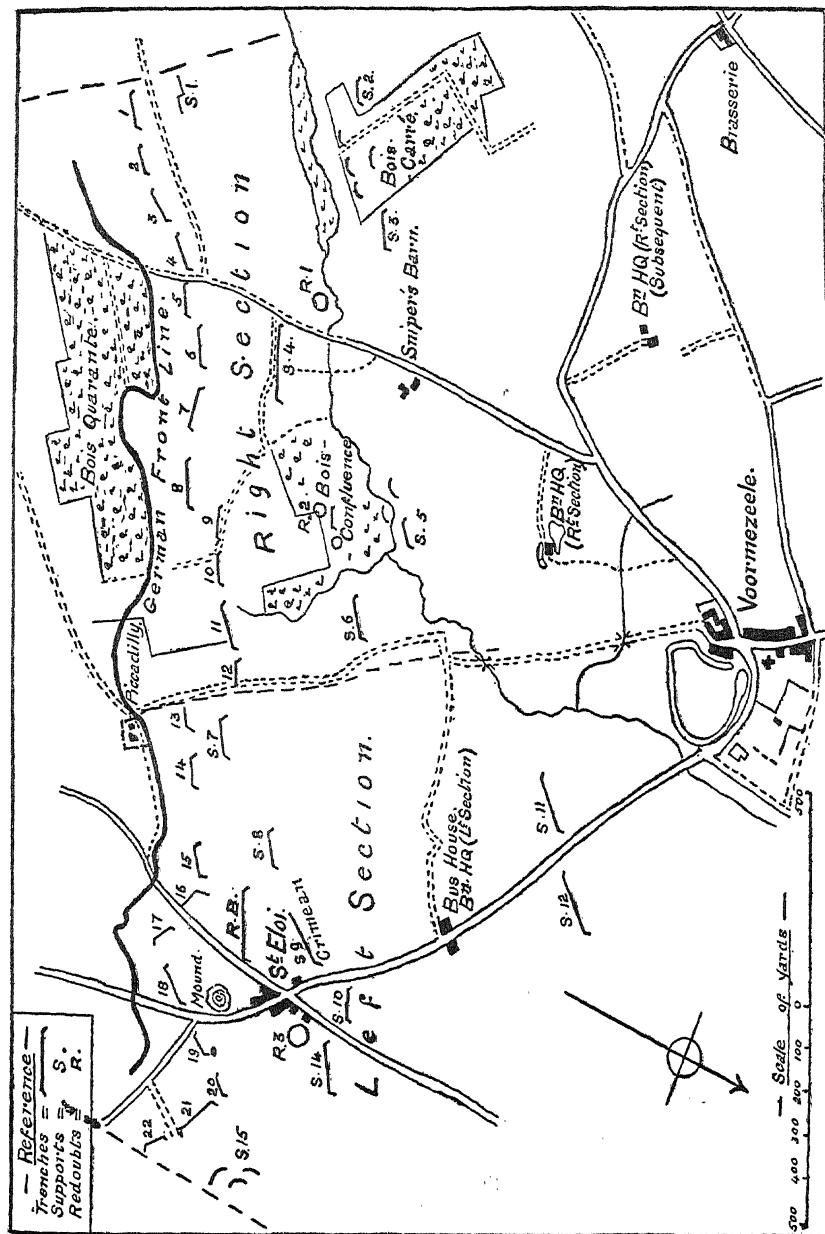
It was essentially a night operation, only to be attempted with trained and reliable troops, for there could be no artillery support. Everything depended upon surprising the enemy; and the initial surprise was complete. "D" Company swooping out of the darkness upon Rifle Brigade Trench scattered the startled garrison, and captured their rations and kit and even a half-consumed meal. The casualties were light but unhappily included Captain Pryce mortally hit. The leading platoon of "C" Company, led by Captain Selby-Smyth, was heavily fired upon from the first barricade, which was at the cross roads near the middle of the village, and Captain Selby-Smyth was killed at the head of his men. But Colonel Thesiger hurriedly sent in the remainder of the company who rushed the barricade and successfully carried it, pushing on and clearing the houses in the vicinity. Heavy fire now broke out from the second barricade, which was some fifty yards

down the Warneton road in the direction of the Mound. This was rushed and captured by "A" Company, who pushed on in the direction of the Mound, only to be met by still heavier fire from the third barricade, across the roadway beside the Mound, and from the Mound itself, which by now had been converted into a machine gun nest. "Repeated efforts were made by individual officers and men to rush forward, but the sting had gone out of the attack," said Colonel Thesiger in his report. This was hardly to be wondered at, for the quality of the surprise had gone, the whole position was swept by the guns on the Mound, and faint daylight was beginning to help the enemy. The congestion on the road was such as to make the bringing up of reinforcements a virtual impossibility, but Colonel Thesiger, who had established his advanced headquarters at the second barricade, sent back the adjutant (Captain H. G. Moore-Gwyn) to bring up the reserve company.

At Bus House, when 5 a.m. arrived with no orders, Major King decided not to carry out his instructions but to wait for developments. At 5.15 a.m. the adjutant reached Bus House and the whole company set out to reinforce at the double, Lieutenant B. M. M. Edwards' platoon leading. In the outskirts of St. Eloi the confusion was by now indescribable. The remnants of the 82nd Brigade on their way out of the line were clotted with the K.S.L.I., who were moving up in support of the Fourth Battalion. "King, Moore-Gwyn, Edwards and I with the leading sections of the latter's platoon got through to where the Colonel was."* At about the same time so much of two companies of the Shropshires as could make their way through the press reported under Major J. H. Bailey to Colonel Thesiger. Hoping to anticipate the daylight, Colonel Thesiger hurriedly organized a general advance against the Mound, but it was too late. Major King, who was in charge, was immediately killed. 2nd Lieutenant T. P. A. Ritchie succeeded in reaching the Mound, followed by a Sergeant and a Rifleman and Captain C. M. Vassar-Smith of the Shropshires. Both officers were shot dead. Lieutenant Ritchie was seen to fall into a trench at the foot of the Mound. Captain Vassar-Smith lay prostrate in the road. Colonel Thesiger, whose escape from death was a miracle, stood with the adjutant and Major Harington in the middle of the village street with bullets flying about them like a cloud of hornets. Lieutenant Stopford Sackville and one Rifleman worked their way along the houses on the left of the road until they reached the last house and from there engaged the machine guns on the Mound with fire. By now it was 6 a.m. "It was almost broad daylight and there was a confused mass of troops by the St. Eloi cross roads." The casualties were beginning to grow heavier; and it was now certain that

* Major John Harington's account.

St. Eloi.
15th March, 1915.



THE FOURTH BATTALION COUNTER-ATTACK ON ST. ELOI AND THE MOUND.
 (Copied from a Sketch Map made by Colonel Harington.)

no attack on the Mound could hope to succeed without heavy artillery preparation.

Indeed, the marvel was that without artillery support of any kind the Riflemen had achieved so much. The barricades had been carried. The village was cleared of the enemy. Only the Mound remained in his possession. Such results might have satisfied all but the most exacting ; but Colonel Thesiger was far from satisfied. He had set out to re-capture the Mound, and anything less was " failure," attributable to a variety of causes set out in his report. Fortunately the authorities took a less rigid view, and the Colonel himself was very justly rewarded with the first vacant Brigade, whilst the Battalion received the personal thanks of the Army Commander, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, and was named in the text of the Commander-in-Chief's despatch. Colonel Thesiger, Major Harington, Captains Moore-Gwyn, R. H. Collins and Stopford Sackville, Lieutenant R. C. Hargreaves,* 2nd Lieutenant C. Saunders and Riflemen S. Blackman, F. Middleton and F. Poplett were all mentioned in despatches for their work that night. Major Harington succeeded Colonel Thesiger in command of the Battalion and was in addition awarded the D.S.O. Captain Moore-Gwyn and Lieutenant Hargreaves were each awarded the Military Cross (the latter as an " Immediate Award "). C.S.M. A. Saunders, wounded in three places, who had still carried on encouraging his men when he could no longer move, and C.S.M. T. Tait, received the D.C.M. ; as also did Corporal E. Felgate who, although wounded, stayed all the following day sniping from the houses in the village.

The total casualties † were five officers and twenty-eight other ranks killed and died of wounds, four officers and fifty-nine other ranks wounded ; and one officer and six other ranks missing—a relatively small price for a magnificent achievement, especially in comparison with the terrible losses sustained by the Second Battalion in heroically attempting the impossible. After a short rest near Poperinghe beginning on March 24th, the Fourth Battalion relieved the French 268th Reserve Regiment of the 17th Division

* Lieutenant Hargreaves, the Battalion bombing and sniping officer, was desperately wounded and of necessity left lying out on the road towards the Mound. An order was issued that no one was to go out looking for wounded as too many men had already been lost in the operation. Despite this prohibition four of Lieutenant Hargreaves' snipers went to St. Elloi on the following night and found their officer in No-man's-land. He had been shot through the lungs and right leg. His left arm was broken. His left foot and right hand had been shattered by shrapnel. Nevertheless the four snipers contrived to bring him in under observation, and carried him back to Dickebusch on a stretcher. He subsequently recovered.

† Killed : Major A. M. King, Captain M. B. Selby-Smyth, 2nd-Lieut. J. G. Stobart, 2nd-Lieut. G. L. Davies, 60th Rifles.

Died of Wounds : Capt. H. B. M. Pryce.

Wounded : Lieut. R. C. Hargreaves, 2nd-Lieut. L. R. Dunne, 2nd-Lieut. C. Saunders, 2nd-Lieut. T. W. Willis.

Missing : 2nd-Lieut. T. P. A. Ritchie.

in trenches on the south side of Polygon Wood facing Polderhoek, an ugly position that had to be abandoned by other troops during the Second Battle of Ypres not long afterwards. In this sector the Battalion alternated in the trenches with the P.P.C.L.I., cementing a friendship already strong and which has since been crowned by the affiliation of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry with The Rifle Brigade.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES. FROMELLES.

THE Second Battle of Ypres was the considered German reply to Neuve Chapelle. It was preceded by a sharp local engagement at St. Eloi on April 14th,* and broke upon the British line on April 22nd. It seems to have been planned as a "break in" rather than a "break through" for no line of exploitation was given to the troops engaged. In fact, on a large scale it repeated the faults of Neuve Chapelle, showing that the British High Command was not alone in the difficulty of grappling with the problems of the new warfare. Moreover, in choosing the sector for attack, the German High Command, like the British at Neuve Chapelle, chose a salient. They chose *the* Salient.

Ypres is a town standing at the south-east corner of a low rolling plain. It faces the middle of a crescent-shaped ridge that extends from the neighbourhood of Staden (ten miles N.N.E. of Ypres) by way of Westroosebeke, Passchendaele, Broodseinde, Zwarteleen, Wytschaete, Lindenhoeke, to the range of quite considerable hills Mont Kemmel the Scherpenberg, Mont Rouge, Mont Noir and the Mont des Cats, five to ten miles south-west of the town. The country north and north-west of Ypres is nowhere much over sixty feet above sea-level—slightly west of north and beyond the Oostvleteren-Noordschote road it becomes a flat marsh, intersected by creeks and ditches that flow out of the Yser River on its way from Esquelbecq to join the Yser Canal some twelve miles north of the city. The bulk of Ypres is above the twenty-metre contour. To the north-east, east and south the ground rises steadily, until on the Staden-Mont Kemmel ridge it reaches an average of one hundred and fifty feet, attaining nearly two hundred at the road fork a mile east of Hooze, known as Clapham Junction, two hundred and fifty feet at Wytschaete, and something between four and five hundred feet at Mont Kemmel and the range of hills behind. Running out from the main ridge on the Ypres side there are subsidiary ridges and spurs. Two of these run gently from Stadenberg into the Houthulst Forest. There is another from Westroosebeke running out to

* Not to be confused with the attack on March 14th recorded in Chapter III.

Poelcappelle and Langemarck. On either side of the Stroombeek as it runs up towards Passchendaele a spur juts forward, the southern of which is the Gravenstafel ridge. From Zonnebeke yet another spur runs parallel with the Gravenstafel ridge to the outskirts of St. Julien. And from Westhoek, below Clapham Junction, the Frezenberg ridge runs north-west and the Bellewaarde spur runs west, whilst in prolongation of both, in a general north-westerly direction, extends the high ground Potijze-Saint Jean-Wieltje-Pilckem, which, though it is less of a ridge than a low watershed, came to be known and fought for as the Pilckem ridge. To the south again there is a spur at Verbranden-Molen, pointing directly at Ypres and running down from Hill 60 (an artificial mound) to the shores of Zillebeke Lake. There is another spur at St. Eloi running to Voormezele; another at Wytschaete, also running into Voormezele; and finally, there is a long ridge running from Mont Kemmel through La Polka and along the Vierstraat-Kruisstraathoek-Ypres road, a steady descent throughout the whole five miles to the Lille gate.

Such is the physical configuration of the country of the Salient.

The front line in April 1915, ran from Ploegsteert Wood, eight miles south of Ypres, behind the Messines-Wytschaete ridge (west of Spanbroekmolen) to Bois Quarante two miles south of Voormezele. Thence it ran to St. Eloi-Hill 60-Herenthage Chateau (east of Clapham Junction)-south-east corner of Polygon Wood-Broodseinde. Then leaving the main ridge which, from Hill 60 to Broodseinde, was in our possession, the line crossed the Gravenstafel ridge (inclusive to the British), skirted the southwestern outskirts of Poelcappelle, took in Langemarck and, passing about half a mile south of Bixschoote, met the Yser Canal at Steenstraate and followed the canal northwards. In other words, the enemy held the northern horn of the crescent, the allies the middle, the enemy part of the southern horn, of which the tip (Spanbroekmolen to Kemmel) was in our possession. The city of Ypres lay in the arms of a crescent, of which the northern arm threatened to pivot on the centre and crush her.

After the reorganization of the line subsequent to the First Battle of Ypres the Salient was held by the French, but since the early part of April, in accordance with an arrangement between Sir John French and General Joffre, the British V Corps side-stepped eleven miles and took over the line as far north as Poelcappelle. On completion of the relief the Salient was held by five divisions. A French Colonial Division and a French Territorial Division prolonged the line from the northern boundary of V Corps to the canal.

The V Corps front was held by the 27th Division from Hill 60 to Polygon Wood (inclusive). The 28th Division held from Polygon Wood to a

point opposite Passchendaele and the Canadian Division from that point to the Corps boundary. The 27th Division front was held with three brigades in the line, each with two battalions in the front line and one in support. Four of the remaining battalions* were held in Divisional reserve—two in the Sanctuary Wood just south of Hooze, and two in the vicinity of Zillebeke Lake. And the two remaining battalions were in Corps reserve, in the area between Ypres and Vlamertinghe.

In accordance with this extension of the British front the Fourth Battalion marched into Ypres on the morning of April 5th and billeted in the town. The sun was shining. It was a mild spring day. The town was as yet almost undamaged, and had received but little shelling since the First Battle of Ypres. The Battalion was billeted in the hospital not far from the railway station. Many of the well-to-do inhabitants had left, but the population was still considerable. "It was possible to get an excellent meal at a restaurant in the Rue de Lille and the old ladies in their white bonnets set out their stalls on the Place in front of the Cloth Hall." The conditions of life in Ypres at that time were almost those of normal peace time. On the 7th, reinforced by a large draft on the previous day, the Battalion moved up to Polygon Wood and took over the trenches along the southern side of the wood from the French 268th Regiment. Here they alternated with the P.P.C.L.I. (the fifth battalion of the 80th Brigade) until April 20th, living a peaceful life in Ypres and an almost equally peaceful life in the line. On April 16th, Major John Harington took over command from Colonel Thesiger on the appointment of the latter to command the 14th Infantry Brigade (5th Division). On April 20th this life of comparative ease came abruptly to an end.

On this day a heavy enemy bombardment broke out. The town began to be shelled with a 17-inch howitzer and the exits were barraged with shrapnel. This had been foretold to officers of the Battalion by one of the French officers whom they had relieved. The first 17-inch shell fell on 82nd Brigade Headquarters in the principal square of the town. Captain R. S. Follett of the Rifle Brigade was the only occupant of the house to escape with his life. "The scene of destruction was indescribable," writes the Fourth Battalion Transport officer. "The 'Place' was littered with débris. Many of the old ladies were killed at their stalls. A horse with its leg broken passed my window. Then a funeral which was scattered by the shelling that now broke out on the Menin Gate." The bombardment died down later in the day; but in the early morning of April 21st as the Riflemen, on relief by the P.P.C.L.I., proceeded into reserve in the neighbourhood of Noordhofwijk, a mile north of Ypres, they noticed that it

* At this time Brigades were composed of five battalions each.

had begun again heavily. There had however been a false alarm of attack only five nights before, and the Intelligence Summary had recorded the emplacement of a 17-inch howitzer in Houthulst Forest ; and although rumours of an impending gas attack were rife among the officers of the Divisional Intelligence it is to be doubted whether anyone in the Battalion had formed any expectation of what was really coming.*

**The First
Gas Attack.**

April 22nd was a fine spring day. The bombardment of Ypres continued. There was a steady exodus of civilians dragging their few movable possessions and making their escape across the fields in the direction of Vlamertinghe. The Fourth Battalion in bivouac along the hedgerows between Ypres and Brielen began to wonder what was happening forward. Lieutenant W. H. S. Alston, standing in the yard of the farm that formed Battalion Headquarters, complained of a smell of chlorine, but the Quarter-master laughed at him and pointed to the farm-yard manure heap which he had just treated with chloride of lime. All through the day the exodus of civilians continued and towards nightfall came the ominous spectacle of French colonial troops in twos and threes and larger numbers, disordered, excited, even afraid, hurrying past Battalion Headquarters, hurrying the same way as the civilians—hurrying away from what ? A party was halted and questioned by the Vicomte de la Mettrie, the Battalion interpreter. They were hoarse and gasping ; they could hardly speak ; they pointed to their throats and their inflamed eyes ; and they told a tale of unimaginable dread.

They had been in the trenches in front of Langemarck. They had only noticed the bombardment of Ypres to breathe the soldier's prayer of thankfulness that it was falling elsewhere than on themselves. Late in the afternoon the firing had died away ; there was a light mist drifting towards them. Suddenly they found themselves half-blinded and gasping for breath, suffocated, drowning, struck down by an impalpable horror in the air. And behind the cloud of mist there were the Germans advancing in full force to the attack. . . . Perhaps there may have come into minds nurtured on the terrors of the Sirocco and the Simoom, a deadly fear that the very elements had taken sides against them. They were seized with panic and fled from their trenches fully believing that the enemy was in full pursuit ; and it would be daring to prophesy that, taken as wholly unawares by so horrid a device, other troops would not have given ground.

* The whole story of the mass of evidence collected by the French and Belgian Intelligence Services as to the German plan for a gas attack and its total disbelief by all responsible Allied authority is told in Volume III of *The Official History of the War*, pp. 163 *et seq.*

But the enemy was not in pursuit. His objective was the Pilckem ridge. He had gained it; and, at a moment when a determined advance would have captured Ypres, and perhaps opened the way to Calais, he was quietly digging in, unknowing or unheeding that between his forward battalions and the city there was nothing, and between him and Poperinghe at most the equivalent of a British division, very scattered and with no prepared defences. If the British Army failed to realize its opportunities at Neuve Chapelle, the Germans threw away immensely greater possibilities on April 22nd.

General Snow, from his Headquarters at Potijze Chateau, observed the cloud passing from the enemy's front line over the French trenches. At such a distance it seemed nothing very remarkable. But before long people began to be conscious of a curious throbbing and tingling in the nostrils and throat. The fumes spread right back to Vlamertinghe; and then it dawned upon the troops that the incredible had happened; and that in violation of the laws of war, the enemy had projected a deadly gas over the battlefield.*

On the 14th of the month a prisoner had been captured with a curious piece of apparatus in his possession. He said it was a respirator and that a gas attack was coming. The statement had been dismissed as a clever ruse on the part of the enemy, designed to create uneasiness and prevent the transfer of troops from the front. And now, after all, it was no more than the plain truth. By this flagrant and barbarous breach of a convention to which the German Government was a party, a formidable advantage had been gained by the German Army. Two French divisions had been scattered in disorder; the flank of the Canadians was in the air, and the front from Langemarck to the canal had been broken.

The measures taken by the Commander-in-Chief and his subordinates to meet this desperate situation were necessarily improvised in character and, since the whole break was on the front of the French, were adversely affected by lack of unity. The Second Battle of Ypres is compared in the Official History with Inkermann—the soldiers' battle. And, indeed, whatever confusion may have been occasioned by the necessity of accommodating in a moment of total shipwreck the conflicting aims and the contrasted methods of Commanders and staffs of two races, the emergency did undoubtedly call out the last ounce of the fighting genius of the British soldier. He is always at his best with his back to the wall.

Sir John French and General Foch might wrangle and despair of ever

* "Laws of War"—vide *Official History of the War*, Vol. III, p. 193, "The Use of Poison Gas."

understanding the other's point of view. The Second Army of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien might be brushed aside to make place for "Plumer's Force," and that body having been driven by circumstances into carrying out the very measures that Sir Horace was superseded for suggesting, might be recrystallized once again into the Second Army with a new commander, General Plumer, at its head. Brigades might be separated from their Divisions, Battalions from their Brigades, and even Companies from their Battalions. The situation might alter from hour to hour; and confusion might triumph for thirty-three days. But the British soldier and his regimental officers went tirelessly and coolheadedly about their work—dismayed by nothing. And they saved the whole cause of the Allies from irretrievable disaster.

Within two hours of the gas attack, reserve battalions from all parts of the Salient were arriving at the focus of danger. The 3rd Canadian Brigade had already thrown back a defensive flank. There was an improvised line along the Poelcappelle road through St. Julien, and also between Wieltje and Saint Jean. There were still dangerous gaps; but the 1st Canadian Brigade was hurrying forward to fill them, and the reserve battalions of the 27th and 28th Divisions were already on the spot.

April 2nd.
The
Fourth Battalion. The Fourth Battalion was directed to stand by in Potijze Wood close at hand to Divisional Headquarters, in readiness to protect the Divisional flank. In the delay before the time for moving off, a conference took place at Battalion Headquarters, after which all the officers sat down together to mess for the first time since their arrival in France. Champagne made a miraculous appearance from one quarter and plovers' eggs from another. No one expected to come alive out of the forthcoming battle; but there was no less gaiety on that account. Shortly after 8 p.m. the Battalion set out marching via Hell Fire Corner through the outskirts of Ypres. No casualties occurred.

It must be understood that the advance of the enemy, seriously though it threatened the Canadians, was almost more menacing to the 27th Division, for whereas it took the Canadians in the flank, it would, if pushed home, take the 27th Division in rear. Throughout an uneventful night, followed by a morning of heavy shelling, the Fourth Battalion remained in the wood. During the afternoon of the 23rd, orders were received to report to the 3rd Canadian Brigade at Mousetrap Farm.* The shelling continued heavily but, by careful reconnaissance of the line of advance, and skilful use of cover, the Battalion was moved forward without a casualty,

* Known at that time as Shell Trap Farm.

halting under cover at Buffs road while Colonel Harington and the adjutant went on to Mousetrap Farm to report to the Canadian Brigadier. Their reception was typical of the spirit in which the action was being fought. Shells, orders and messages were flying in all directions. As was only natural so soon after the enemy's success, there was considerable uncertainty as to the whereabouts of other formations, and as to the exact locality of the line. "It did not seem a particularly healthy spot," comments a Rifle Brigade officer, dryly; but General Turner, the Canadian Brigadier, was in excellent spirits. Was he down-hearted? No! Far from being merely on the defensive, his Brigade was at the moment doing an attack. He was quite satisfied with the situation; and the Rifle Brigade might stand by until further orders.

They stood by till 10 p.m., at which hour they were told to move down to the canal bank and report to the 13th Brigade at Bridge 4. This Brigade (1st Bn. Royal West Kent Regt., 2nd Bn. K.O.S.B., 2nd Bn. Duke of Wellington's Regt., and 2nd Bn. K.O.Y.L.I.) had borne the brunt of the fighting at St. Eloi a fortnight earlier. Prior to the gas attack, it had been resting and refitting in the Vlamertinghe area. It had not yet received its full reinforcements and had consequently gone into battle below strength; since when, having suffered severe casualties, it was depleted of senior officers, and the battalions were reduced to little more than companies. The Fourth Battalion arrived at the rendezvous at 11.30 p.m. They were met by the Brigadier who ordered them to take over the entire front held by his skeleton battalions—a line, east of the canal and running in front of Lancashire and Fusilier Farms across the Pilckem road to the outskirts of Turco Farm, from which point it was held by other troops along the general line Canadian Farm, Kultur Farm, Spree farm cross-roads, Kansas Cross—Gravenstafel (exclusive). As was but to be expected the defences were of an improvised and even sketchy character—in many places no more than breast high. There were numbers of dead. Many of the wounded still lay where they had fallen. Remnants of French Colonial troops were mixed up with the British. In the trenches on the right of the road there were wounded Canadian machine gunners, indomitably holding out in their posts. Beyond them, further to the right, were the remnants of a Territorial battalion. Colonel Harington put "B," "C" and "D" Companies into the fire trenches, and held "A" Company on the Canal Bank. The whole Battalion then turned to, like a horde of navvies, dug and threw up a defensible system, and buried no less than a thousand dead that told of the fury of the fighting in that neighbourhood.

But the battle was only beginning. Next day, the 24th, the Zouaves and the Turcos were to advance at 2 p.m., and regain the ridge from which

the gas had driven them. Under a barrage of '75's the French Colonials assembled for this attack "with great skill," passing over the Fourth Battalion trenches in extended order, and forming up, despite heavy machine-gun fire, on a line some two hundred yards in advance of the Battalion. Shot and shell had no terrors for these gallant Africans, but the enemy had stumbled upon something which had. Just as the line was moving forward to the attack, the enemy once again let off a cloud of gas which, says an officer of the Rifle Brigade, "rolled down the hill towards us like smoke." The orderly line of dashing poilus became a terrified un-reasoning mob. Beside themselves with fear, like wild animals at the sight of a prairie fire, they turned in their tracks and bolted blindly back in the direction from which they had come. As they fled across the lines of trenches, the Fourth Battalion manned the parapet and opened rapid fire through the gas cloud to forestall any counter-attack. Fortunately the gas was beginning to disperse; moreover the wind was carrying it diagonally across the front. Acute discomfort was caused in the eyes and lungs, but there were no fatalities. Not a man left the trenches; and no attack developed. "That night," the report grimly concludes, "the Battalion buried dead in great numbers." Next day the shelling was heavy. Casualties were commensurate. In the darkness, when it came, the glare of burning farm buildings added a touch of the luridly picturesque to the ugly realism of the battlefield.

The incidents of the next few days furnish from the experiences of one battalion an illustration of the chaos that hung like a fog over the whole battlefield and still obscures the truth. When Colonel Mordacq's French Colonials attacked on the 24th, it is clear from the Fourth Battalion records that so much of the advancing force as passed over the Battalion trenches was driven back by gas. This incident however finds no place in the Official History, which moreover shows the French occupying a neat line of blue dots in front of the Rifle Brigade from the 24th onwards. It is possible that this line was occupied by infiltration from the left flank during the night. But if so, the Fourth Battalion were unaware of it.

On April 26th there were orders to abandon the Pilckem line and move to trenches in the neighbourhood of St. Julien in relief of the 2nd Bn. the Buffs, the right battalion of the temporary formation known as Geddes' detachment. It was at St. Julien, and in particular in the locality of the Gravenstafel Ridge, that the enemy's pressure was developing. There is something instinctively repugnant to soldiers in leaving a position unheld; and there was no suggestion of handing over. But the order was explicit. The 13th Brigade, from whence it came, had moved from the canal bank to Saint Jean. There was no telephone and no means of speedy communi-

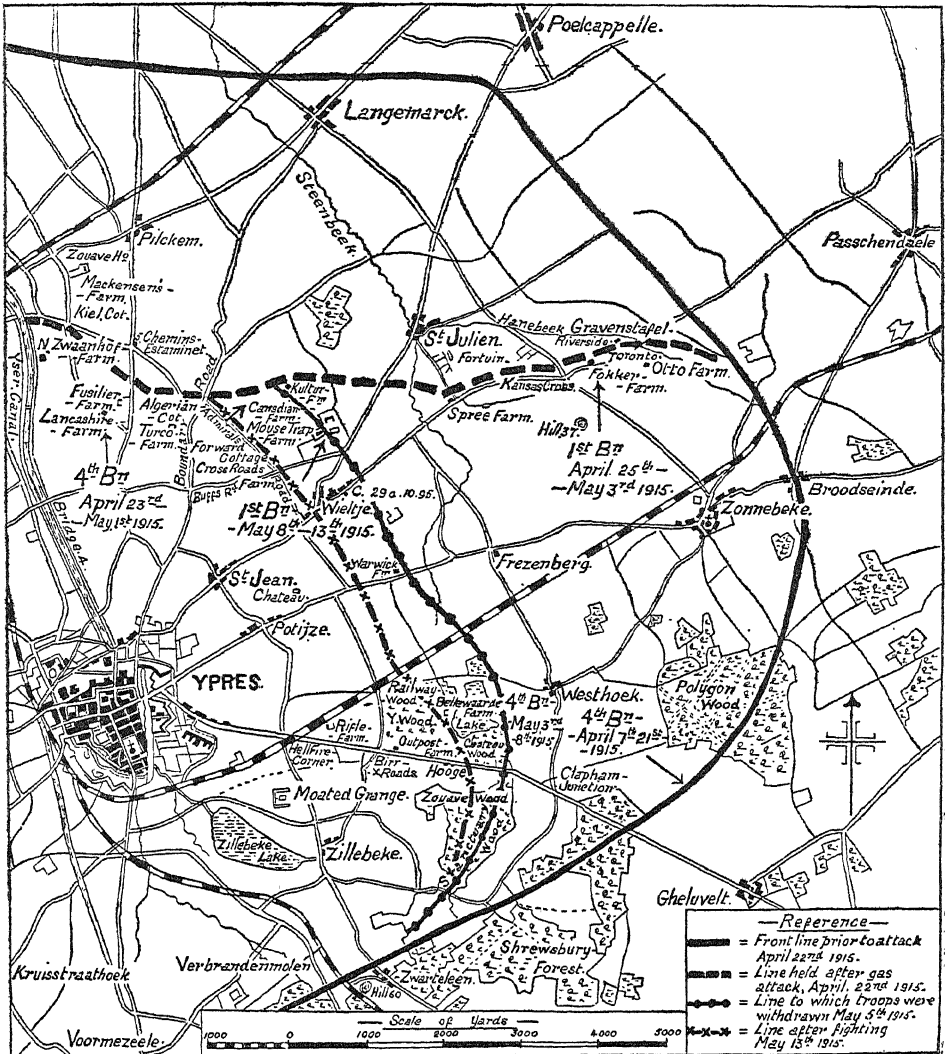
cation. According to the order there would be guides at the rendezvous—the junction of Buffs Road with Boundary Road—to pilot the Fourth Battalion to their new trenches. The Battalion withdrew in terms of the order and waited at the rendezvous till dawn in unmoled vigil. The explanation lay in the fact that, owing to the weakness of Colonel Mordacq's Zouaves it had been decided to postpone the relief of the 2nd Bn. the Buffs and leave the Riflemen in their former trenches; but as this decision was uncommunicated to the unit most closely affected by it, the Riflemen spent the night waiting for their guides—and waiting in vain. The rendezvous was on a road under direct observation by daylight. At dawn Colonel Harington withdrew the Battalion behind the hedgerows for concealment, and dispatched his adjutant to the 13th Brigade to report what had happened and to say that, in default of further orders, he proposed at 7 a.m. to take his Battalion back to the line from which it had come. But the night had been fruitful of surprises. 13th Brigade Headquarters by now had moved and were not to be discovered. At 7 a.m. therefore the Colonel carried out his intention. Favoured by the morning mist he succeeded in doing so without a casualty. By a miracle the mist held until the movement was completed, and then lifted suddenly. Had the lift taken place during the march across country the Battalion must have been annihilated, for the ground was in full view of the enemy. That night the move took place, the Riflemen side-stepping to trenches in front of Canadian Farm to the north of Wieltje, from which on the following day they gave supporting fire to an attack by the Sirhind Brigade of the Lahore Division which had been hurried north from the First Army.* The shelling continued to be heavy but no enemy attack developed. Next day, the 28th, a German aeroplane, winged by an anti-aircraft gun, flew low over the Battalion front line. Every man in the trench opened rapid fire. The machine was seen to crash behind the lines—the observer subsequently admitting that the rifle fire had brought it down.

On May 1st the Fourth Battalion was relieved in the line—pleasurably anticipating a few days for rest and cleaning up. Further orders however were received directing it to join the 82nd Brigade in Sanctuary Wood as a working party. In this sector up to that time, “a blessed calm prevailed,” especially in Sanctuary Wood where, at times, says a company officer, “the only sound was the singing of the nightingale.” After two days of trench digging they proceeded to join the 80th Brigade at Hooge, taking over a new front-line system on the Bellewaarde spur in preparation

* According to the Official History the Ferozepore Brigade actually attacked through the Riflemen with the Sirhind Brigade operating on the flank. The battalion records however specifically refer to the support given to the Sirhind Brigade.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES.

22nd April-25th May, 1915.



THE MOVEMENTS OF THE FIRST AND FOURTH BATTALIONS DURING THE BATTLE.

for the contemplated evacuation of the Polygon Wood salient by the 27th Division. This evacuation took place on the night of May 4th/5th. It was necessitated by the heavy pressure and gradual inroads of the enemy between St. Julien and Zoonebeke and involved the abandonment of the commanding positions on the Clapham Junction section of the main Kemmel-Staden ridge. But, however regrettable, it was imperatively dictated by the situation farther north. On completion of the manœuvre, the 80th Brigade line ran through the middle of Sanctuary Wood, across the Menin Road a quarter of a mile beyond Hooze, along the eastern face of Chateau wood, to the south-eastern corner of Bellewaarde Lake, whence it swung forward at an angle of 45° and, taking in the crest of the Bellewaarde spur in a small semicircular salient, swung back again roughly to the line of the wood and ran down the slopes of the spur toward the railway cutting—that portion between the Menin Road and Bellewaarde Lake being the Fourth Battalion sector.*

Meanwhile, what of the First Battalion?

The First Battalion Involved.

Between the 15th and 23rd April the 4th Division was relieved by the 48th (South Midland) Territorial Division, the 5th Bn. Gloucestershire Regt. (T.F.) taking over from the First Battalion at St. Yves on the 15th. The conditions in that sector may be gauged from the action of the enemy on Bismarck's birthday. They decorated their front-line breastworks with Japanese lanterns, which presented a remarkable spectacle of illumination by night. There was a considerable amount of sharpshooting at these unique targets—without, however, any appreciable effect. On relief the Battalion went back to billets in the neighbourhood of Steenwerck where training was carried

* The Second Battle of Ypres has been officially subdivided by the Battle Nomenclature Committee into the following battles:—

(1) *Gravenstafel Ridge* (April 22nd–23rd): This was the gas attack from Langemarck, and would be more accurately described as the Battle of Pilckem.

(2) *St. Julien* (April 24th–May 4th): In this, as will be seen both the First and Fourth Battalions were engaged; and in this battle the enemy's pressure developed from Gravenstafel Ridge. (See above.)

(3) *Frezenberg Ridge* (May 8th–13th): This action was fought not only at Frezenberg but considerably south. The Fourth Battalion was heavily engaged in this battle under Bellewaarde Spur (May 8th and 9th). The First Battalion came in for the tail end of it at Mouse-trap Farm north of Wieltje on May 13th.

(4) *Bellewaarde Ridge* (May 24th–25th): This battle in which of the Rifle Brigade the Fourth Battalion only was engaged, was actually fought west of Bellewaarde Ridge which had been lost on May 8th/9th.

These subdivisions are doubtless necessary for the purpose of the granting of battle honours. But in the history of a Regiment, of which two Battalions only were engaged, to adhere to them would only interrupt the continuity of the narrative without conferring any compensating advantage.

For the purpose of this History, the Second Battle of Ypres has therefore been regarded as a whole.

out until the evening of the 23rd. On the 23rd the machine-gun section engaged the Transport at football. "No side" was blown without a goal scored. They agreed to play another ten minutes each way to settle this vital question of pre-eminence. They had scarcely begun again, however, when the Commanding Officer hurried up to the ground with orders to move off at once. "However," says the machine-gun officer, "I persuaded him to let us finish the match." The Armada was not permitted to interfere with Drake's game of bowls; and the First Battalion knew of no reason why the Second Battle of Ypres should obtrude itself upon a football match. "Rather an abrupt ending to our month's rest—just one week!" Early next morning they entrained at Steenwerck.

On the same day the battle was renewed at St. Julien. By 6 p.m. on April 25th the 11th Infantry Brigade, lent for that purpose to the 28th Division, was on the road between Vlamertinghe and Ypres, marching via Saint Jean to reinforce the remnants of the 2nd Canadian Brigade, which had been temporarily placed under the 11th Brigade Commander (General Hasler). The whereabouts of this formation, except that it was to be found somewhere to the south-east of St. Julien, was not very clearly ascertainable in the fog of war. The Battalion skirted Ypres, which was under heavy shell fire, and marched via Hell Fire and Deadman's Corners. The road was choked with ambulances and walking wounded. Confusion and congestion were at their height. Nevertheless Saint Jean was reached without mishap, partly owing to the bright moonlight and partly to the invincible good spirits of the men. "Are we downhearted," shouted one of the Battalion machine gunners to another of the section. "No," yelled the other. "Then you damn soon will be," called out a passing Canadian.

At Saint Jean it seemed to the rear companies and transport that the halt was unnecessarily prolonged. After a lengthy check the Battalion moved forward and then it was known what had caused the delay. "I could hear the shells bursting farther up the road. We halted again. Thought it was another block in the traffic. We gradually pushed ahead until I came to the place that had caused the delay. A direct hit. A shell had burst plumb in the middle of the leading company and twenty-three men were lying in the road, writhing and (some of them) screaming. A stretcher-bearer when he saw me shouted, 'Get off that horse, sir, and hold this man's artery while I bandage him up.' I did so; and found the man had no feet. Beastly." From Saint Jean forward the 11th Brigade* marched through Wieltje and proceeded under intermittent shell fire along

* Less the Hampshires, who had been sent on earlier by a different route to find touch with the 88th Brigade near Zonnebeke and extend down the Gravenstafel-Fortuin road to link up with the main body of the 11th Brigade.

the Gravenstafel road with the First Battalion leading and "C" Company thrown forward as an advanced guard. Beyond the advanced guard however the Brigade Commander, the Brigade-Major, Colonel Seymour and Captain Liddell pushed on ahead searching for the Canadians who were to meet them. "Not," observes the machine-gun officer in his Diary, "as laid down in Field Service Regulations."

"Just east of Wieltje," the same narrative proceeds, "I was told to halt and unlimber. The Battalion went on, and I hoped I should be able to find them. We didn't take long in unloading the guns and ammunition. Lawrence* was jolly good—he was looking after all the reserve ammunition. All the extra stuff we dumped behind a hedge (C.29. a.10.95) and then we moved forward. We were very heavily laden—machine-gun tripods, spare parts and as much ammunition as we could carry. The men were splendid, and in spite of their heavy loads pushed on fast. It was all so extraordinarily interesting. There was no traffic up here—just a few parties of men wandering about, none of whom in the least knew what was happening or where the Boche was. . . . About half an hour later we were challenged, and to my delight I found Hasler and Bill Seymour, who told me where to find the Battalion. As I went on I heard Hasler say: 'Now Bill, you must do your damndest to-night!'" . . .

At Spree Farm cross-roads near Fortuin and just behind the Steenbeek the Battalion had been met by Canadian guides and now, led by the Canadian Brigade-Major, was on its way along the lanes and ridges south of the road to the point known as Hill 37. About two hundred yards from the cross-roads the machine guns caught up with the Battalion which was then deploying to the right of the road. A false alarm led to an attack by "C" Company on an unoccupied hedgerow that in the half light took on all the appearance of a party of the enemy. For the information received by General Hasler at the cross-roads had been misleading. He was given to understand that hostile patrols had reached the Fortuin-Gravenstafel road, and that few if any British troops were in the locality. He therefore turned his command aside to Hill 37, where they dug in. The Rifle Brigade passed the night in dug-outs made by the French in the days when St. Julien was a couple of miles behind the front line. On the right of the hill they were in touch with two companies of the Somersets. On the left, touch had still to be gained. Just as daylight was breaking dim figures were seen approaching through the morning mist. The machine gunners manned their guns; the Riflemen lined the apology for a parapet. But the new-comers were not Germans. They were the remnants of a battalion of Durham Light Infantry Territorials. When the

* The Regimental Sergt.-Major.

mist cleared it was found that there were British troops in trenches along the Wieltje-Gravenstafel road some distance in advance of the Rifle Brigade position and roughly one thousand yards east of the Spree Farm cross-roads. 2nd-Lieutenant G. L. Jackson was sent out with his platoon to find touch with these troops. Meanwhile parties of the enemy were seen trickling down the Gravenstafel ridge into the Hanebeek valley as though reinforcing the line for an attack. A tense period of waiting followed, but no attack developed. Heavy shelling from the front and left flank had broken out soon after daylight, and lasted all day and most of the following night, causing one hundred and three casualties, including two officers. 2nd-Lieutenant K. S. Trotter was killed by a direct hit. Next day the shelling continued, but the trenches had been somewhat improved during the night and the Battalion escaped with sixty casualties. The position was still critical and the plight of the Riflemen in the "death trap," as they somewhat grimly styled the excavation which they occupied on Hill 37, was far from enviable. A move was obviously necessary. The right of the East Yorkshire Regt. was on the Wieltje-Gravenstafel and Zonnebeke-Langemarck cross-roads (Kansas Cross). The left of the Hampshire Regt. was on the Hanebeek, where the Wieltje-Gravenstafel road crosses it. The position assigned to the First Battalion on the slopes of Hill 37 was in rear of both the neighbouring battalions. Accordingly at nightfall on April 27th patrols a platoon strong from each company were pushed out to secure the line of the Wieltje-Gravenstafel road between those two points by occupying the buildings beyond it, with a view to taking the Battalion forward into line with the units on its flanks. Meanwhile however the enemy had been slowly and methodically pressing forward to consolidate the ground he had gained. "C" Company's platoon managed to force a way into its house, but Fokker Farm, Toronto and Riverside, the remaining buildings on the north side of the road, were all found to be too strongly held for capture. A considerable number of casualties were met with, and, by Brigade orders, the platoons were withdrawn. Sergeant C. Sweeting of "B" Company had the experience of being suddenly surprised by a party of the enemy as he was crawling towards the objective of his platoon. To avoid being captured he rolled over and pretended to be dead. As he lay there, one of the enemy drove a bayonet into him, after which he lay "doggo" for more than an hour "until things had quieted down" and then crawled back to his company. The failure of the operation necessitated another day in the "Death trap." On the following night a line was chosen from the cross-roads immediately south-east of Kansas Cross to the bridge over the Hanebeek on the Gravenstafel road. This line was entrenched and occupied; so that, by the morning of the 29th, the

Battalion was up in line with the rest of the Brigade, in touch on the right with the Hampshire Regt., and on the left with the Somerset Light Infantry, who had meanwhile relieved the East Yorkshire Territorials. On the night of the 30th, the Battalion extended its right, taking over from the Hampshire as far as Canadian Farm,* about two hundred yards east of the Hanebeek. On the same night, two companies of the East Yorkshire Territorials were attached to the First Battalion. The 11th Brigade line was now in a satisfactory state of defence. Colonel Seymour was however early warned by Lieut.-Colonel F. R. Hicks, the acting Brigadier,† that should the French attacks fail, in the north of the salient, the line would fall back to the Frezenberg ridge two miles to the rear, where new defences were in the process of construction. All preparations for such a movement were therefore unobtrusively made.

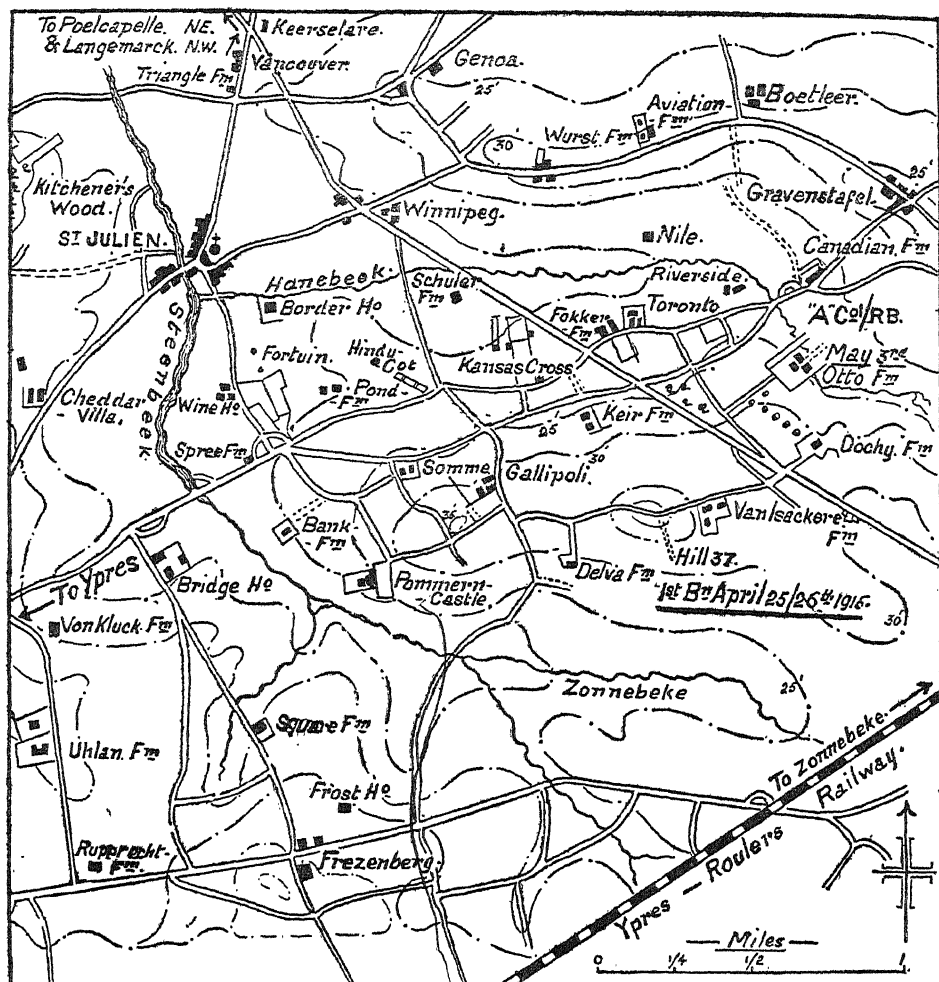
May 1st was quiet. May 2nd was also quiet until the early evening. At 5 p.m. a furious bombardment with 8-in. howitzers broke out. This continued until 8 p.m., but no attack developed. Thanks to the care with which the new trench line had been made, there were no more than thirty casualties; but the trenches suffered severely. All night the Battalion toiled in repairing them. At 4.30 a.m. a German field battery engaged "A" Company's trenches from the Gravenstafel ridge less than a thousand yards away. The battery came into action in the open. Apparently there was no artillery ammunition available for reply. As the daylight grew stronger, troops could be seen pouring down the enemy's communication trenches and massing in the valley of the Hanebeek below. Much activity was visible in the farm buildings north of the Gravenstafel road. Rather to the surprise of the defenders no attack developed, although the shelling continued. Later in the morning (about 7.30 a.m.) it seemed clear that the enemy instead of attacking over the top was sapping forward in the dead ground in the valley a couple of hundred yards away from the British front line. By half-past eight "A" Company (Captain H. G. M. Railston), on the extreme right, was in a sorry condition. The trenches had been for the most part obliterated, and the Company had suffered heavy casualties. Communication was extremely difficult. The position was enfiladed from the Gravenstafel ridge, and, to add to the difficulties, the nature of the line cut off one half of the company from the other. "A" Company was astride the Hanebeek. The line extended from Canadian Farm to a point in front of Otto Farm one hundred and fifty yards south of the stream; and, as if the stream itself presented an insufficient problem in defence, the banks were in a state of bog, so that there must be a gap of more than

* Formerly a Canadian Dressing Station.

† General Hasler was killed on April 27th.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES.

22nd April-25th May, 1915.



THE FIRST BATTALION OPERATIONS.

25th April-3rd May.

fifty yards on either side of it. One platoon of the East Yorkshire Territorials was attached to "A" Company in the front-line trench. Two more platoons were in support in the outskirts of Otto Farm. Colonel Seymour, who was by now cut off from Brigade by the volume of shell fire, was wisely reluctant to reinforce "A" Company unless a definite attack should develop; for the trenches were still so heavily pounded with shells that by noon, in the sector immediately north of the Hanebeek there was not one man left unwounded; and to the south of the stream, in "A" Company's line, there were only Captain Railston and three men fit to use rifles. These four were a company in themselves. Led by Captain Railston, they raced up and down what remained of their trench, firing off rifles as though it were strongly held. In Canadian Farm 2nd-Lieutenant B. Gibbs was holding out with his platoon. But of the remaining three platoons of "A" Company, the borrowed platoons of the East Yorkshire Territorials, and the right platoon of "B" Company hardly a man was left. The enemy still seemed to be concentrating in the Hanebeek valley, but was still unable to make up his mind to attack. At 2 p.m. Colonel Seymour reported to the 11th Brigade that reinforcements must be sent up at dusk to fill the gap in the neighbourhood of the stream. At 3 p.m., after a short but violent bombardment with heavy artillery, there was a half-hearted attempt at an attack. It was broken by rifle fire. By four o'clock the enemy, sapping steadily forward, had approached within fifty yards of Canadian Farm. But 2nd-Lieutenant Gibbs, Sergeant A. A. Vasselin and Rifleman Meredith rushed into the open and bombed the Germans out of their sap. It cannot be questioned that the coolness and resolution of Captain Railston and this officer, so magnificently copied by their men, held off an attack which, had it developed, might have had a truly disastrous effect upon the whole battle. Further on the right the Buffs of the 85th Brigade had been pressed back to their support line. A break through at that moment would undoubtedly have imperilled the new but uncompleted line on the Frezenberg ridge; and if the Frezenberg ridge had gone with the 27th Division still holding out in front of Polygon Wood, it may well be that, in the scramble to avoid being outflanked, Ypres itself would have fallen.

Every one remembers the story of the Dutch boy who, passing along the dykes, saw a trickle of water oozing through; and stopped a hole with his fingers, till help should arrive. That is the nature of the achievement of "A" Company of the First Battalion on May 3rd. The enemy was trickling forward. He had no great stomach for an advance. But had he found a weak spot in the wall, the trickle would speedily have become a massed attack. And if a massed attack had been delivered with real

determination against that flimsy barrier, where might it not have ended ? " We waited like this from 11 a.m. till 8 p.m. and they never attacked. Goodness knows why. I think a good many people prayed pretty hard that day."*

At dusk the reinforcements arrived and the Battalion withdrew to Elverdinghe. Captain Railston was awarded the D.S.O. and Lieutenant Gibbs the Military Cross. Sergeant A. W. Ford and Acting-Corporal J. Ellingham, Captain Railston's right-hand men, each received the D.C.M. for their share in the exploit. The casualties were four hundred and fifty. The account of this battle would be incomplete were it to omit the name of the medical officer, Captain G. E. Ferguson, R.A.M.C. " V.Cs have been won for less than he did," writes the machine-gun officer. The Battalion Aid Post was situated at the notorious Spree Farm cross-roads (Fortuin). It was under continuous shell fire. Not only did the medical officer establish an aid post for cases passing through, but he organized a kind of advanced dressing station for severely wounded, where, in addition to medical attention, they were given hot drinks, soup and milk food. The post was the most advanced station in that sector and was consequently utilized by other units. No ambulances could come forward by day, but the casualties poured in day and night. For eight days in every condition of hardship and danger Captain Ferguson worked on without sleep at his task of saving life. He was admirably assisted by Corporal Andrews, his aid-post orderly.

The
Fourth Battalion
at Bellewaarde.

On May 5th the Fourth Battalion, between the 3rd Bn. 60th, who held the line in Sanctuary Wood, south of the Menin Road, and the P.P.C.L.I. who held the little Bellewaarde-ridge salient, observed at 10 a.m. that the Germans were already following up the evacuation of the previous night. Many of them, with that love of plunder, however useless, that is common to

* The exploit of the First Battalion is thus recorded in the *Official History of the War*, Vol. III, p. 294.

" Soon after General Plumer's orders [for the withdrawal] had been sent out, the enemy's pressure, with great concentration of heavy artillery, began to increase near the junction of the 85th and 11th Brigades at Berlin Wood. Here there were in the line the 2/Buffs (Major R. E. Power) . . . the 1/Hampshires (Lieut.-Col. F. R. Hicks), and the 1/Rifle Brigade (Lieut.-Col. W. W. Seymour), with the Fusiliers now in support behind the junction of the brigades. The British heavy artillery on the west bank of the Canal was ordered to support the sector, but it was five miles away; towards 2.55 p.m. every German gun seemed to be concentrated on Berlin Wood, and at 3 p.m., when an infantry attack developed at two points against the Buffs and the Rifle Brigade, they had to rely on the rifle. The men of the former battalion in Berlin Wood and the front trenches near the salient were all killed or wounded and the defence was taken up in the support line. But the 1/Rifle Brigade, though reduced to one man to every twelve yards of trench, maintained a resistance in its front line."

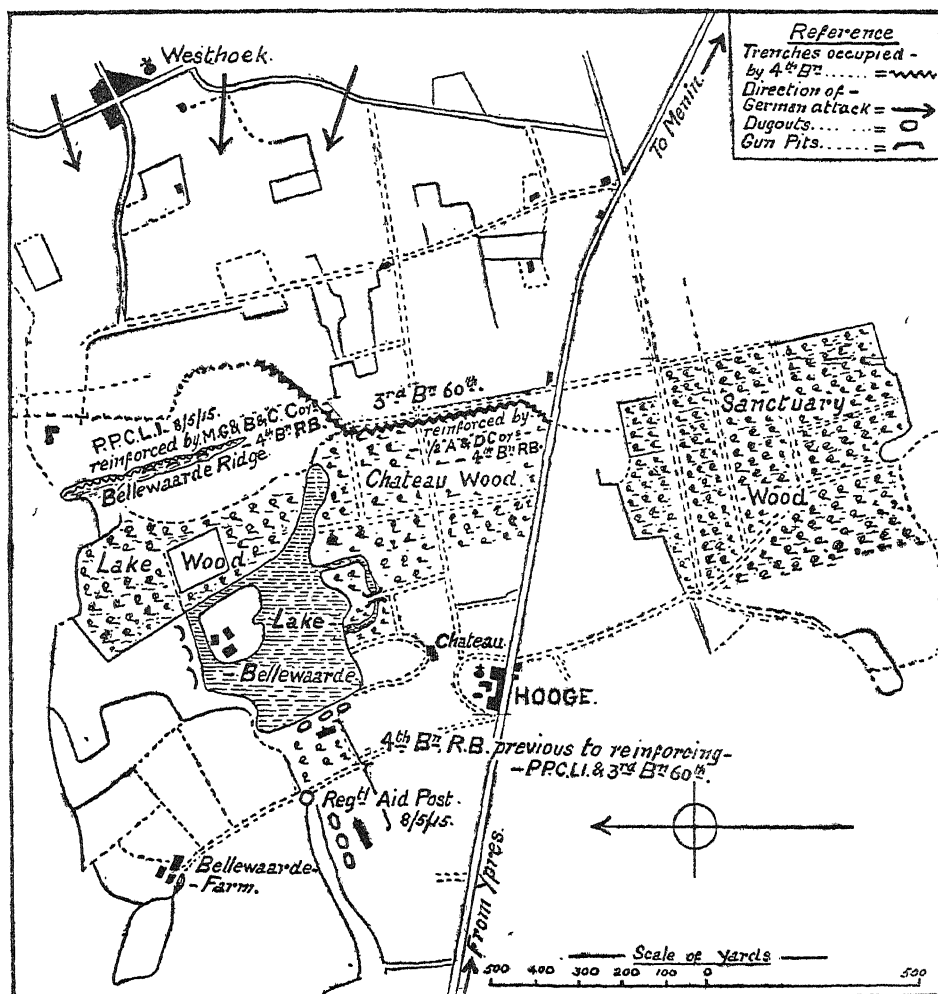
soldiers of all races, were clad in British greatcoats, much as, later in the war, the British soldier might sometimes have been seen grotesquely transformed in a German trench helmet. The immediate result of this disguise was to mislead the Fourth Battalion who, under the impression that they were witnessing the approach of some belated detachment of their own comrades, withheld their fire—though not for long. It was now apparent that the greater part of the new position was commanded from the ground that had been given up. The evacuated Westhoek ridge overlooked Chateau Wood from the north, whilst Clapham Junction towered above them to the south-east, and at a bare six hundred yards they were under observation from the Menin Road. "The position of the companies for the next two days," as an officer of the Battalion writes—with commendable restraint, "was not pleasant." The enemy hurried up his artillery and machine guns to little more than point-blank range. A sustained bombardment, reinforced by gas shells and heavy machine-gun fire, to which for lack of ammunition, there could be little or no reply from the Royal Artillery, was rained upon the new line. In two days the Fourth Battalion lost nearly one hundred and fifty killed and more than two hundred wounded! In truth the position was not pleasant. And there was as bad again to come.

On May 8th the Battalion was in dug-outs behind Bellewaarde Lake waiting to relieve the Princess Patricia's in the left sector of the front. The 3rd Bn. 60th were now in the Chateau Wood trenches formerly held by the Rifle Brigade. Early on the morning of the 9th, a bombardment began, of such intensity and so sustained as to be the prelude to nothing less than a general attack. The enemy was about to renew the advance upon the newly occupied British positions. What is called the Battle of Frezenberg ridge had now begun. The Fourth Battalion machine guns were at once hurried forward to support the P.P.C.L.I., whilst half of "A" and "D" Companies (Lieutenant A. J. Murdoch and Captain L. C. Stopford Sackville) were dispatched into Chateau Wood in support of the 60th. The attack developed in strength. By 10 o'clock the Princess Patricia's were in serious straits. "B" and "C" Companies of the Fourth Battalion (Captain B. M. M. Edwards and Captain R. P. A. de Moleyns) were sent to their help.

It was none too soon. The line of the 28th Division on the left had broken. The bombardment was severe. The Princess Patricia's were reduced from six hundred men to a bare one hundred and fifty. But they clung to their ground stubbornly and were found upon it by the Riflemen who pushed forward to their assistance; "We have seen the angels to-day," said the grateful Canadians. "They had R.B. on their shoulders."

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES.

22nd April-25th May, 1915.



THE FOURTH BATTALION IN ACTION AT HOOGE.

8th May, 1915.

(Copied from a Sketch Map made by Colonel Harington.)

By now the gap on the left flank had made the hold on the top of the spur no longer tenable. A line was occupied along the eastern edge of a long narrow copse that runs to the north, and in front of the lake. By half-past eleven the enemy was working forward from the abandoned ground on top of the spur. He was met and stopped by the Fourth Battalion machine guns. Later he attempted to advance again and failed before the fire of the Riflemen and Canadians. On the front of the 60th, Lieutenant J. G. M. Henderson, in command of the detachment of "D" Company, met and broke three separate attacks with rifle fire. He was relieved that night by the remaining half company and marched back with four men left out of sixty! On the left flank, and some distance in rear of the position, Captain F. H. A. Wollaston, the second-in-command, saw a large party of the enemy digging. He charged them with "C" Company and routed them. Night found the 80th Brigade substantially on the line on which it had begun the day.

Before daylight next morning the bombardment began again. The enemy was evidently set upon capturing the position. On the other hand the British artillery was still, for lack of ammunition, condemned to silence. The trenches were blotted out: the men were in shell-holes or behind anything that gave a measure of cover. At 4 p.m. the German infantry advanced. The Fourth Battalion machine guns and the scattered Riflemen, with the other units of the 80th Brigade, did their utmost in vain. The Rifle Brigade and the 60th Rifles fell back together to the support trenches behind the wood. But the pace was too hot to save the machine guns; which, rather than let them fall into the enemy's hands, the machine-gun corporal threw into Bellewaarde Lake. In the support line, reinforcements came up from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; but the enemy was satisfied with his gains and made no further attack. The Rifle Brigade casualties, when it is considered that they began the battle in support, were heavy—more than fifty killed, more than three hundred wounded, and nearly fifty missing. Colonel Harington was among the wounded. He was hit on the 8th, but refused to leave the Battalion until the battle was over, when Captain Wollaston took command. Captain de Moleyns (who in four days with the Battalion had been hit twice) and Captain Edwards, the two company commanders who had taken their companies to the help of the P.P.C.L.I., were both wounded. 2nd-Lieutenants W. B. W. Durrant ("C" Company) and Wood ("B" Company)—their two subalterns—were both killed, leaving the two companies without officers, for 2nd-Lieutenant W. Trevelyan of "C" Company had been killed on the 5th, and 2nd-Lieutenant H. C. Gracey of "B" Company had been wounded on the same day, whilst Lieutenant A. H. Pelham Burn of "B" Company had

gone sick. The remaining companies were hardly better off. Captain J. J. B. Cole of "A" Company had been wounded on the 5th. 2nd-Lieutenant J. A. V. Duff had gone sick on the following day. In "D" Company Lieutenant T. A. Tatton was now wounded, so were Captain W. H. S. Alston, the Battalion machine-gun officer, and Lieutenant A. C. Burnell, the Adjutant. Captain R. L. H. Collins, the transport officer, came up and took over "B" Company; 2nd-Lieutenant H. M. Ramsay-Fairfax-Lucy, who had distinguished himself by helping to save one of the machine guns of the 3rd 60th, was deputed to act as adjutant.* The Quartermaster and the Regimental Sergeant-Major, who had been put in charge of the transport to relieve Captain Collins, begged unsuccessfully to be allowed to go into the firing line.

Company Sergeant-Major W. Apsey and Rifleman W. K. Forbes both won the D.C.M. for their gallantry in the action. On the 8th Sergeant-Major Apsey had saved a critical situation: he collected about ten men of his company when there was danger of the enemy breaking through, and repulsed him with loss, taking one prisoner. Throughout the following three days Rifleman Forbes made many journeys to the front line under fire in broad daylight, guiding reinforcements and taking messages or ammunition. The Battalion remained in the new front line five days longer. "Quiet days," observes the Battalion Diary. Attacks took place on the right and left, but the 80th Brigade was let alone. On the 14th the Cavalry took over, the Rifle Brigade being relieved by the 5th Dragoon Guards. The Battalion marched back to the neighbourhood of Poperinghe. Since the beginning of the battle of Ypres on April 27th, it had been wiped out. On that date it reached Saint Jean nine hundred and thirty-two strong. In the ensuing week the casualties amounted to eight hundred and sixty-eight—two hundred and sixteen killed, six hundred and six wounded and forty-six missing. Sufficient reinforcements now arrived to bring it to a strength of four hundred and twenty-five all told.

The
First Battalion at
Mousetrap Farm.

Meanwhile farther north the withdrawal to the Frezenberg ridge had taken place, and the First Battalion on coming from its four days in reserve, went into the new line on May 8th at Mousetrap Farm—a group of buildings surrounded by water, on the high ground north of Wieltje overlooking St. Julien and the valley of the Steenbeek. The trenches did not actually pass through the farm which was held as a double platoon post some thirty yards in advance and to the right of the front line. "B"

* Captain Collins was subsequently appointed Adjutant as soon as Captain R. P. Burrowes arrived to take over "B" Company.

Company (Captain O. B. Graham), "A" Company (Captain H. G. M. Railston) and "I" Company (Captain C. J. Gasson), from right to left, held the Battalion front, with "C" Company (Captain F. St. J. Blacker) in support. The days that followed the 8th—so pregnant of disaster for the Fourth Battalion—passed uneventfully for the First Battalion. There was shelling, but "it was chiefly the farm buildings that suffered." This gave an opportunity of improving the trenches. On the 13th, however, at 4 a.m. an intense bombardment heralded the coming of an attack. The enemy having driven in the British to the south was about to make a bid for the remainder of the Frezenberg-ridge position. The gleam of fixed bayonets in his front-line trenches told unmistakably of his intentions.

By 4.50 a.m. (such was the severity of the bombardment) the trench of "I" Company's left platoon had been obliterated, and the platoon had ceased to exist. This created a gap between the First Battalion and the Hampshires. A platoon of "C" Company was detailed to fill it; but meanwhile the Hampshires extended their right and maintained touch. At 7 a.m. the attack came, and failed completely on the left and in the centre. This was followed by further bombardment until, at 7.30, the attack was renewed on the right and the East Lancashires were driven back. The position of the advanced post in Mousetrap Farm was becoming highly precarious. The post was inaccessible by daylight—doubly so under the intensive shell fire of that morning. At 7.5 a.m. British soldiers had been seen falling back from south of the farm; and it seemed probable that the enemy had occupied it. At 7.30 reinforcements from the 2nd Bn. Essex Regt. (12th Infantry Brigade) came up on the right to counter-attack, by which time some of the enemy had penetrated through the gap and were behind the British line, where they were engaged by the First Battalion machine guns firing actually over the *parados* of the trench. The counter-attack was carried out with magnificent dash and success. It drove back the enemy, passing over the front line and forward through the farm buildings. But the situation on the centre and left of the Battalion grew more serious. Two further attacks developed. Each was heavily repulsed. By now the casualties were mounting high; and the trenches for the most part had been blown in. "C" Company was brought forward to thicken the firing line. Then came a short lull, during which the enemy was seen to be digging in about thirty yards north-east of the farm. A little before 11 a.m. the shelling began again. At noon a company of the East Lancashire Regt. was brought forward in support of the First Battalion. Everything pointed to a renewal of the battle; but half an hour later the enemy's efforts died down and the attack was not repeated. At dusk the East Lancashire Regt. went forward to the farm, and re-

occupied it without opposition. But of the garrison (two platoons under 2nd-Lieut. J. A. L. Stewart) there was no trace. They had been killed or captured to a man. . . .

The First Battalion was relieved that night by the Royal Irish Rifles. Corporal H. E. Sunnuck and Rifleman J. J. Halls, both of "B" Company, each gained the D.C.M. Cut off from their company for nine hours by the destruction of their trench, they had held out in their post and, by their accurate shooting, had defeated all attempts by the enemy to dig in on the right front. Acting-Corporal J. Parker also gained the D.C.M. for conspicuous gallantry in continuing to distribute ammunition along the front trench under a heavy fire, although he had been wounded early in the day.

This was the last stage of the Battle of Frezenberg Ridge that had begun against the Fourth Battalion on the 8th, and had continued in a succession of attacks all along the line until the 13th. It was also the last appearance of the First Battalion in the Second Battle of Ypres. In consequence of the enemy successes elsewhere, the ground defended by the 11th Brigade on May 13th was abandoned, the defence being withdrawn one thousand yards to the line Turco Farm-Admiral's Road-Wieltje-Warwick Farm. The Frezenberg ridge was in the hands of the enemy. But his advances throughout the battle had cost him heavy losses, which had increased considerably with each succeeding attack. After a short rest on the canal bank the First Battalion came back for a month to the ordinary routine of trench warfare in the new Wieltje line, with short rests on the canal bank or at Vlamerlinghe Chateau. On June 10th the 4th Division moved to the extreme north of the Salient, taking over from the French 45th Division at Boesinghe. In the left sector of the 11th Brigade area of the new line, which ran from the junction of the trenches with the Yser Canal, five hundred yards south of the Boesinghe railway bridge, to the crossing of the Boesinghe-Cinq-Chemins Estaminet, and the Lancashire Farm-Zouave House roads, seven hundred yards north-north-east of North Zwaanhof Farm, the First Battalion and the Somersets took alternate spells of trench duty until the beginning of July.

This however anticipates the sequence of events. The Second Battle of Ypres was not yet over. In the early morning of May 24th the enemy attacked again along the Bellewaarde spur, and drove back the 28th Division. At 2.30 p.m. the 80th Brigade, which had been brought forward to Brandhoek, was ordered to report to the 28th Division for the purpose of counter-attacking with the 84th Brigade and recapturing the Bellewaarde Farm position. Brig.-Gen. Smith immediately directed the Brigade to rendezvous

at Kruisstraathoek, and hurried to the Divisional Commander, who ordered him to attack on a front extending from the centre of Bellewaarde Lake to the Menin Road. On rejoining his Brigade at the rendezvous the Brigadier called his commanding officers together and gave orders personally. The exact position of the 28th Division troops was unknown. The best that could be done was to define right and left boundaries of the attack and leave it to the troops, when the front line had been found, to attack within these limits. The left of the Brigade was the Eclusette, the right the Menin Road. The Brigadier therefore detailed the Fourth Battalion (with 4th Bn. 60th in support) to attack on the right, with its right on the Menin Road, and the 3rd Bn. 60th (with the 2nd Bn. K.S.L.I. in support) to attack on the left, with its left on the Eclusette. The P.P.C.L.I. would be in reserve. The Brigade then set out for the G.H.Q. line in front of Ypres, while the Brigadier went to look for the 84th Brigade. By 7.30 p.m. the leading battalions were in the G.H.Q. line and had sent out patrols to find the line of the 84th Brigade. In the interval the Brigadier had found out that the 84th Brigade was too weak and too scattered to co-operate, and there was nothing for it but to take the whole enterprise upon the shoulders of his own Brigade. He accordingly detailed the 4th Bn. 60th and 2nd Bn. K.S.L.I. to come up from support and take the place of the 84th Brigade, attacking from Bellewaarde Farm to the Eclusette on the left of the other battalions. Respirators—small pads of cotton-wool—had been issued out to the men: but the gas shelling was heavy, and the makeshift proved useless. Conditions could hardly have been less propitious for a night operation. The whereabouts both of the enemy and of our own troops were unknown. The situation on the flanks was obscure. "We started off in four lines—'A,' 'B,' 'C' and 'D,' and moved forward at snail's pace," says the Battalion Diary. The whole attack was a failure. The K.S.L.I. advanced to within ten yards of the enemy's trench, encountered heavy fire and fell back to the road running south from Railway Wood to Birr cross-roads. The 4th Bn. 60th had the same experience. The 3rd Bn. 60th were driven back nearly to Rifle Farm. And on the front of the Fourth Battalion, "our attack was held up and we dug in where we were" with the right on the Menin Road, and the left about four hundred yards in advance of the 60th, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Outpost Farm. A post was thrown out to connect with the cavalry in Zouave Wood. In this position they stayed until the night of the 25th, when they worked forward and dug a new line south from the Menin Road, and about three hundred yards farther east. The 3rd and 4th Battalions of the 60th came up on the right of the Fourth Battalion, and prolonged the line to Zouave Wood. On the left of the 28th Division the line stabilized through Railway

Wood and along the eastern face of "Y" Wood. They waited, expecting a renewal of the attack next morning ; but there was none. The Second Battle of Ypres, after raging for five weeks, was over at last. It had cost the First and Fourth Battalions of the Regiment an aggregate of eight officers and three hundred and forty-seven N.C.O.'s and Riflemen killed, twenty-one officers and one thousand one hundred and forty-nine other ranks wounded, and one hundred and twenty-nine missing. Most of the last must be presumed to have been killed. The Fourth Battalion was taken out of the line on the night May 26/27th, and proceeded to Busseboom, whence, a week later, it moved with the remainder of the 27th Division to take over the Armentières line from the 6th Division, now due for a turn in the Salient. The Third Battalion, which was affected by this move, had spent a quiet spring at Bois Grenier, losing however five officers and forty-seven other ranks killed, and three officers and one hundred and eleven other ranks wounded in the five months of the year. And the Second Battalion, farther south, had again been called upon for a great effort.

Preparations for When the Battle of Neuve Chapelle came to its un-
Fromelles. satisfactory end the First Army Commander was by no
means content to leave things as they were.

Almost before the reverberations of the combat had died away, Sir Douglas Haig was urging Sir John French to resume the struggle from another angle and with fresh troops. He believed that by prolonging the battle he could break down the resistance of the enemy and gain possession of the coveted Aubers Ridge. Sir John French was at first inclined to authorize the attempt, but a study of the ammunition expenditure at Neuve Chapelle revealed so alarming a shortage that he changed his mind and the plan was dropped.

Other influences however were also at work. The French Commander-in-Chief had already suggested that the British should co-operate in an offensive during April, and on the 6th of that month he sent General Foch to arrange the details of a combined operation directed towards the plains of Douai and the German railway communications in that locality. What had been debateable when proposed by Sir D. Haig became a duty when requested by the French. The Field Marshal consented; the objective given to the British was the capture of the Aubers Ridge; and the task was confided to First Army. The nature of the plan of attack was necessarily governed by the fact that there was no sufficiency of ammunition, and the plan of Sir Douglas Haig was to concentrate every available round upon making two small gaps, to pour his troops through these, rolling up

the enemy on either side, send in the cavalry, and neutralize his lack of siege artillery by restoring open warfare conditions. It is impossible to understand the Battle of May 9th, without appreciating the fact that the character of the operation was largely dictated by the necessity of eking out an inadequate ammunition supply.

The Aubers Ridge (which was the name given to the higher ground Aubers-Fromelles-Herlies-the Pommereaus-Le Plouich—that rises above the main ridge between Armentières and La Bassée flanking the Lys River to the south-east) was most readily accessible from the British front line at two places—the new position at Neuve Chapelle and the point of junction with the Rouges Bancs-Sailly Sur la Lys road, where the trenches ran forward east of Picantin. Neuve Chapelle had been tried. It remained to attack from the north. Accordingly the Army Commander assigned to Sir Henry Rawlinson's IV Corps the task of breaking through at Rouges Bancs, and capturing Fromelles, Le Plouich and Aubers. The Indian Corps was to attack from the south near Neuve Chapelle. These converging attacks would meet at La Cliqueterie Farm on the top of the ridge west of Herlies. Speed was the essence of the operation. As soon as the front line had been broken on the IV Corps front, "an advanced guard, including some mounted troops will at once be pushed forward with the object of gaining a footing on the Fromelles-Aubers Ridge." *

The IV Corps plan was large and simple. The 8th Division would make the breach in the neighbourhood of Rouges Bancs, capture Fromelles on the left (with a flank thrown back to La Cordonnerie Farm) and the Delaval Farm-Aubers road on the right. The 7th Division would go through the "gap" and capture Leclercq Farm (on the Aubers-Fromelles road), Aubers, and Le Plouich (south of the road), finding touch with the Indians at the point selected by the Army Commander. The exact locality of the 8th Division breach was laid down. It was to be "where the Fromelles road † passes through the hostile breastwork." It was to include also a small salient some eight hundred yards west of the road, known as Point 372.

It is with the plans of the 8th Division that this history is concerned; and the plans of the 8th Division, within the limits prescribed by IV Corps, were as follows. The enemy's wire was known to be thick and his defences to be strong. The artillery therefore would concentrate upon making a thorough breach along a short strip of the front. The troops would hurry through it whilst the artillery lifted to selected targets. Some

* IV Corps Operation Order.

† The road Sailly Sur la Lys-Rouges Bancs-Fromelles.

would go forward. Others would work right and left in rear of the enemy line, enveloping both his flanks, and thus widening the breach. From the moment of zero every one was to begin moving like a piece of machinery. A strip of trench extending about two hundred yards on either side of the Fromelles road was selected for the main breach. But there were to be two subsidiary breaches. Point 372 was to be reduced by artillery fire; and, to the east of the road on the extreme left of the attack, a series of mines that had been tunnelled under the German front-line system were to be fired at zero.

The rôle of the infantry was subdivided into the right and left attacks, so called in relation to the Fromelles road which was the inter-brigade boundary inclusive to the right brigade. The right attack was to be carried out by the 24th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-Gen. R. S. Oxley) with engineers, mountain guns, trench mortars and cyclists attached; the left by the 25th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Lowry Cole) with similar attached troops. The bombardment would begin at 5 a.m. By 5.15 the wire would be cut. After 5.10 the artillery and trench mortars would open on the German trenches and continue bombarding until 5.40, except at Point 372* where the bombardment would continue until 5.50 a.m. The infantry would assault the Rouges Bancs position and the craters at 5.40 a.m. Point 372 would be attacked at 5.50. Thereafter the attack would be in four stages. The capture of the Rouges Bancs road was the first stage. The second was to secure the line Rue Delaval-Delaval Farm-La Biette-Les Clochers—with flanks thrown back on the left and right to the old front line. The third stage on the right was to reach the line of the Rue Delaval-Aubers road, up to a point five hundred yards short of that village, and hold a front facing south-west towards Trivelet and the Rue d'Enfer: on the left a line was to be reached, from the farm three hundred yards south of La Biette-Hayem cross-roads to the Rue des Turcs. At the end of this stage the 7th Division, which throughout the operation was to advance in rear of the 8th, would pass through and attack Leclercq Farm and Aubers. The fourth stage was the attack of the 25th Brigade on Blondel Farm and Fromelles, with the 23rd Brigade (Brig.-General R. J. Pinney) in support.

The 24th Brigade plan for the right attack was to assault with the 2nd Bn. East Lancashire Regt. on a two-hundred-yard front † giving them for an objective the road between Delaporte Farm and the junction with the Fromelles-Sailly road. Immediately behind the East Lancashires, the 1st Bn. Sherwood Foresters were to cross the German front line, incline

* In addition to the general bombardment, two 18 pdrs. were specially detailed to engage this from the British front line.

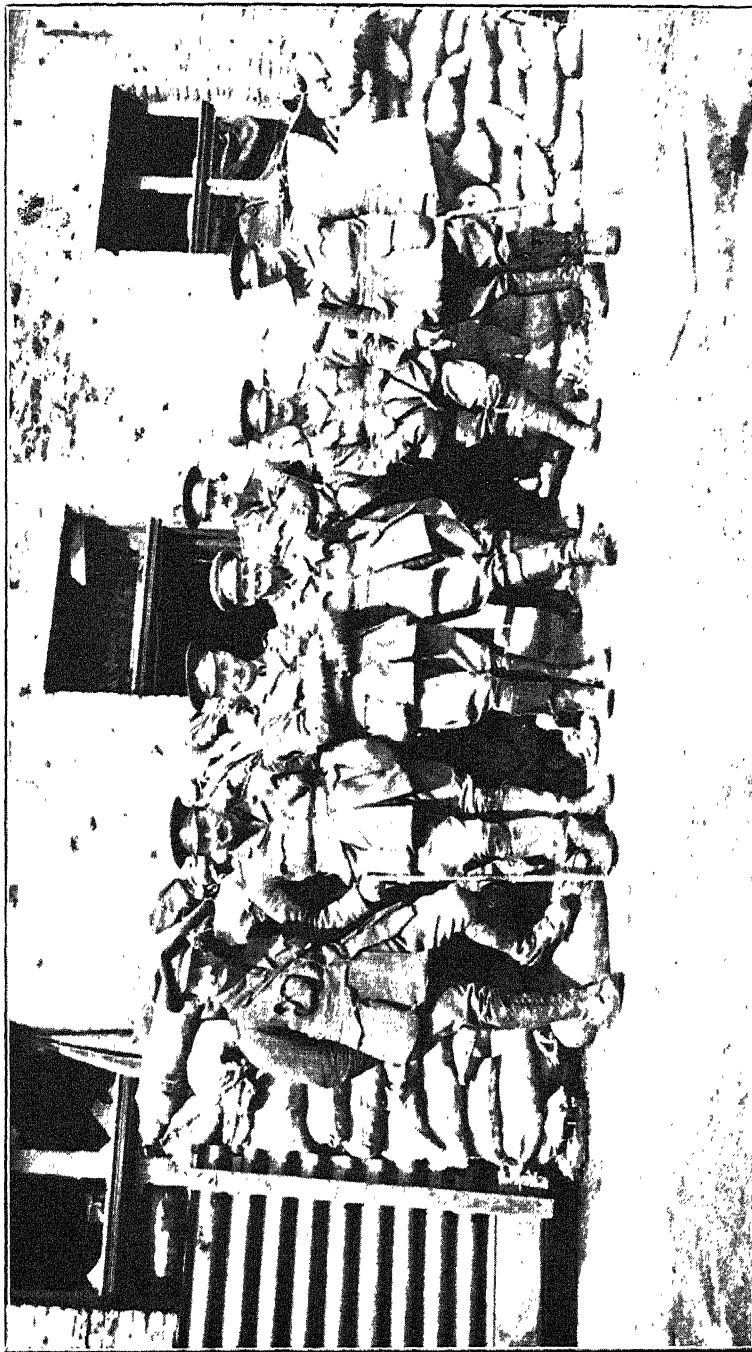
† This was dictated by the extent of the wire-cutting bombardment on the German defences.

to the right and capture the continuation of the Delaporte Farm road from the elbow two hundred yards west of Delaporte Farm, as far as the elbow two hundred and fifty yards north of Delaval Farm. This would bring the Sherwood Foresters immediately in rear of the enemy defences at Point 372. The 1st Bn. Worcestershire Regt. would move forward in rear and come up behind the East Lancashires. The 2nd Bn. Northamptonshire Regt. would attack Point 372 at 5.50 a.m. and the 2nd Bn. Black Watch would occupy the German trenches and remain in Brigade reserve. As no part of the plan was subsequently realized the further details are unimportant. The 25th Brigade orders for the left attack were that the Second Battalion the Rifle Brigade, the 1st Bn. Royal Irish Rifles, and the 13th Bn. London Regt. (Kensington) should attack simultaneously—the Second Battalion and the Royal Irish Rifles together on a two-hundred-yards front * through the gap in the German defences, the 13th Bn. London Regt. a few hundred yards to the left at the mine crater. The Rifle Brigade were to push forward to the road at Rouges Bancs, which would bring them on the left and slightly in advance of the 2nd Bn. East Lancashire Regt. The Royal Irish Rifles were to make for the same road and to bomb to the left towards the 13th Bn. London Regt. The 13th Bn. London Regt. having occupied the mine crater were to push on as far as a line level with the objective of the Second Battalion and to bomb inwards towards the Royal Irish Rifles, and outwards to the track running back to the front line from the Rue des Turcs. The 2nd Bn. Royal Berkshire Regt. were in support to the Second Battalion; the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. to the Royal Irish Rifles. The 1st Bn. London Regt. was in Brigade reserve. These movements were to take ten minutes from the time when the attack started. In the ensuing fifteen minutes the Royal Berkshires were to pass through the Second Battalion and advance beyond La Biette. The Lincolns were to pass through the Royal Irish Rifles and get a footing on the road triangle north-west of Hayem. The Rifle Brigade, having reformed, were to move in support of the Royal Berkshires, sending forward a party to hold and fortify La Biette, whilst the Royal Irish Rifles supported the Lincolns, and the 13th Bn. London Regt. formed a defensive front facing east. In the third and fourth phases of the attack the Royal Berkshires were to take Blondel Farm, a group of buildings close to Fromelles station; while the Second Battalion, coming up on the left, advanced and captured Fromelles. The remaining units were to consolidate the ground gained.

Preparations for the battle began on April 14th and continued until

* This, as in the case of the 24th Brigade, was dictated by the size of the gap to cut in the wire.

C.O. AND COMPANY COMMANDERS OF 2nd BATTALION
AT H.Q. OF "E" LINES, RUE TILLELOY, NEAR LAVENTIE, April, 1915.



Captain
P. A.
Kennedy.
("P.")

Captain
A. K.
Hargreaves.
("C")

Colonel
R. B.
Stephens.

Captain
S. A.
Sherston.
("A")

Capt. I. C.
Maclean
(R.A.M.C.).

Lieutenant
R. C. J.
Chichester-
Constable
(Adj.).

Captain
C. A.
Werner.
("D")

May 7th. All officers were familiarized with the assembly places and their lines of advance. At the last moment Captain J. E. V. Isaac, D.S.O., contrived to rejoin the Battalion from the General Staff in order to take part in the action. There was special training of machine-gun sections and bombers. Wire cutting by hand was practised. Blocking parties were formed and trained and, so that there might be no misunderstanding as to the positions reached by the infantry, they were issued with distinguishing flags. The capture of Deleval Farm was to be notified to the Royal Flying Corps by laying out a ground strip (the first employment of contact patrol). The capture of Leclercq and Blondel Farms was to be signalled by daylight fireworks. Indeed everything was planned with such nicety that there was danger of losing sight of the fact that the success of the operation depended on passing a large body of troops through one narrow defile and that the existence even of that narrow passage was contingent upon the effect of fifteen minutes' shell-fire upon a well-wired position.

The
Second Battalion
Attack.

On May 9th, after a postponement from the previous day, the bombardment began at 5 a.m. As if to herald a day of disappointment a number of "shorts" caused severe casualties in the advanced sap where "B" and "D" Companies of the Second Battalion were assembled to lead the attack. At 5.40 a.m., undismayed by this unlooked-for misadventure, "B" and "D" Companies (Captain P. A. Kennedy and Captain C. A. Werner) swept across to the German trench taking it in their stride, and pushed on to the Battalion objective, followed by "A" and "C" Companies (Captain S. A. Sherston and Captain A. K. Hargreaves) who occupied and consolidated the German trench. Battalion Headquarters crossed immediately in rear of the support companies. But the enemy machine-gun fire was terrific, and heavy casualties were at once experienced. The Battalion machine guns were unable to get across; Battalion Headquarters was dispersed in the passage; and the bombing and blocking parties, so carefully organized beforehand, were at once broken up and could not be reassembled. Nevertheless the task which had been set to the Second Battalion had been performed swiftly and well; and they were just enjoying the pleasant afterglow of success—when they suddenly realized that, except for a handful of the Royal Irish Rifles, they were entirely alone; and it dawned upon them that their predicament was unenviable in the highest degree. Where were the turning movements to right and left that were to enlarge the gap? Where was the advanced guard "including some mounted troops" that was to press on as soon as the first objective was secured? The Rifle Brigade were on the first objective. Where were the East Lancashires on the right, and the Sher-

wood Foresters beyond them? They were lying out in No-man's-land; and most of them would never stand again.

The success of the attack on the Aubers Ridge was dependent on the perfect co-ordination of a highly involved plan. In that respect it is not unlike the famous French attack on the Chemin des Dames in 1917. It needed to work like machinery. On the extreme right of the attack* the 2nd Bn. Northamptonshire Regt. advanced against Point 372 from their place of assembly in the orchard near the foot of the Rue Petillon. They advanced on a two-company front. The right company found the wire cut but was caught by enfilade machine-gun fire and reduced to one officer and forty men, who effected a lodgment in the German front line. On the front of the left company the wire was uncut, and that company was wiped out. The supporting company was held up in No-man's-land, unable to move. And the reserve company could not get beyond the orchard.

The main attack, on the right of the Sailly-Fromelles road was even less fortunate. The leading companies of the East Lancashires, who were assembled in a trench on the south side of the road, at an angle to the line of their attack, sought to neutralize this disadvantage by creeping out at 5.30, during the bombardment of the German front line in readiness to charge when the guns lifted. Despite the bombardment they were at once met by heavy fire from the enemy front line and thrown into disorder. At 5.40, when the bombardment lifted, there was such a hurricane of machine-gun fire that the East Lancashires withered away and no further advance could be made from the Sailly road. But speed was the essence of the operation. From the moment of zero every one was to move forward in obedience to the time-table. There was to be "a continuous forward movement of fresh troops." Whilst the East Lancashires' attack was being smashed on their own parapet, the Sherwood Foresters, the Worcestershires and the Black Watch were all coming forward from behind. The trenches became congested; movement became wellnigh impossible; and then the enemy's counter-bombardment descended to add to the confusion. Half an hour after the attack began, the Sherwood Foresters were launched at the supposed breach on the right of the East Lancashires. The assaulting companies got to within forty yards of the enemy line and could get no farther. Then it was discovered that "the wire on this front was sunk, and was only effectively cut in one place about a yard wide."† By 7 a.m. the 24th Brigade, in a state of hopeless confusion, was endeavouring to re-organize, and the attack was at a standstill.

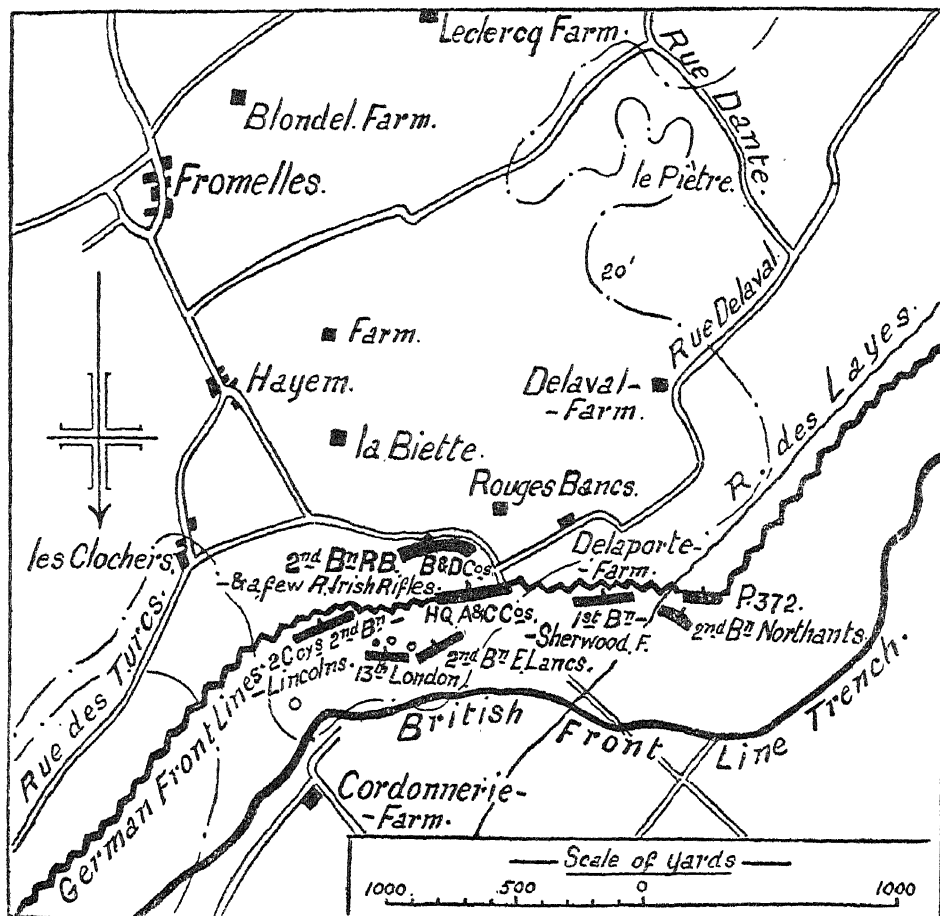
On the left, except for the successful advance of the Rifle Brigade the

* At 5.50 a.m.—ten minutes after the battle had begun elsewhere.

† 8th Division report on the operation.

THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES.

9th May, 1915.



THE ATTACK OF THE SECOND BATTALION ON ROUGES BANCs.

(Situation, 7 a.m.)

tale of misfortune was continued. The Royal Irish Rifles, barring a few who succeeded in reaching the German line with the Second Battalion, had disappeared completely in the tempest of machine-gun fire that greeted both battalions as they left their trenches. Probably the fire was more severe on the left than on the right. The leading platoons of the 13th Bn. London Regt. flung themselves into the crater before the enemy had recovered from his surprise. The remainder of the battalion was unable to move a yard, owing to the severity of the fire that broke out immediately after that feat had been accomplished. The Royal Berkshires who, according to the plan, should have gone through the Second Battalion on the Rouges Bancs road were unable to get across No-man's-land. Most of this battalion crawled into a disused fire trench in front of the British breast-work. Some however made a shift with such cover as they could find in the open. The remaining troops of the 25th Brigade were herded together in the front line and assembly-sap in an advanced state of disorganization ; and were so found by the Brigadier when he arrived at 6.20 a.m.—forty minutes after the attack began. In these circumstances he ordered up his Brigade reserve (two companies of the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt.) and dispatched them in support of the 13th Bn. London Regt. with orders to bomb towards the Second Battalion and join up with the latter. Almost immediately afterwards a further stroke of misfortune befell the attackers. In some mysterious manner, which has never been explained, an order to retire was circulated among the troops out in front.* It does not seem to have reached the Second Battalion, nor is there any record of it in their diaries, but from all directions men began retiring towards the original line. With conspicuous gallantry General Lowry Cole sprang upon the parapet and succeeded in restoring order. The action cost him his life, for he was mortally wounded.

This fatality put Colonel Stephens of the Second Battalion in command of the 25th Brigade. But Colonel Stephens was forward in the captured trench, and it was some hours before he could be informed, and some hours later before he could leave his Battalion in order to take over. Major S. FitzG. Cox of the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. carried on in his absence, and during this time the two companies of the Lincolns under Captain B. J. Thruston succeeded in reaching the enemy's line, some distance to the left of the Second Battalion, where they made good about two hundred yards of the trench. Shortly afterwards the artillery reopened fire upon selected targets ; and Major Cox rallied the remaining two companies of the Lincolns which then tried in vain to advance. The machine-gun fire was as heavy as before.

* 8th Division account of the operation.

Meanwhile the two companies ("B" and "D") of the Rifle Brigade on the Battalion objective found themselves in a veritable death-trap. From either flank and from the rear, they were subjected to a withering fire. One by one the company officers were killed and wounded, until by 8 a.m. there was none left, and the men, weary of being taken in reverse, began to fall back from the road upon the captured trench, astride the Rouges Bancs-Sailly road, which had been consolidated, from a point fifty yards west of the road, to a point two hundred yards beyond it to the east. The situation at 8 a.m. along the 8th Division front was as follows. On the right, except for the handful of Northhamptons gallantly holding out at Point 372, the operation had been a total failure. On the left the Second Battalion with a few Royal Irish Rifles held two hundred and fifty yards of the German front line. A couple of hundred yards farther to the left Captain Thruston's detachment of the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. held another strip of German front line. And the 13th Bn. London Regt. still held their crater, and were trying to work forward from it. In between these units the enemy was actively holding out, and was bringing so much heavy fire to bear on No-man's-land that reinforcement was not practicable. A further bombardment was ordered on the right; and the 24th Brigade was told to attack again at 9 a.m. The bombardment was carried out, but at its conclusion, General Oxley declared that it was impossible to make a further attack on the right. His brigade was too disorganized.

Meanwhile the Riflemen were still at work, converting the trench, and building blocks on either flanks. This work had been attended by considerable difficulty, for they were constantly bombed from the flanks and could make no effective reply, owing to the shortage of bombs and the disorganization of the bombers. The reinforcements from the front enabled the defence to be more securely prepared; and the bombing attacks from the flanks were now more easily repelled. At noon, 2nd-Lieutenant W. E. Gray, the Battalion machine-gun officer, started from the assembly-sap with fifty reinforcements, all but twenty of whom were shot down crossing No-man's-land. A machine gun had been captured with the trench. 2nd-Lieutenant Gray was able to set this working—a valuable addition to the defences. Just at about that time Colonel Stephens was told of the death of the Brigadier, and his own succession to the command of the Brigade. But for the moment the important thing was to hold the trench; and he remained with the Battalion. At 7.50 p.m. the enemy counter-attacked again. He was easily beaten back, 2nd-Lieutenant Gray's improvised machine gun contributing powerfully to the result.

At 8.30 p.m. all was quiet. Colonel Stephens then left the captured

trench and returned to advanced Brigade Headquarters in the old British front line, to take command of the Brigade. There he was met by the Brigade-Major Captain J. C. Dill with Colonel Hastings Anderson (G.S.O.I. 8th Division). A consultation took place. In view of the failure of the attack at all other points the question was whether to continue to hold the captured trench, or withdraw under cover of darkness. Colonel Hastings Anderson's information was that the 7th Division would attack next morning. On that assumption it was vitally important to hold what had been taken. Colonel Stephens therefore determined to reinforce the trench with every available man, and to proceed himself to the 7th Division Headquarters in order to arrange for fresh troops to take over as early as possible. He succeeded in organizing a party of some seventy Riflemen with two machine guns, and two bombing parties from the Royal Berkshires. This detachment he sent forward under Captain C. J. Newport, Royal Irish Rifles, who then took command of the trench—for all the senior officers of the Rifle Brigade had been killed. This done, the Acting Brigadier hurried to 7th Division where he was given two companies of the 2nd Bn. Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regt. (22nd Infantry Brigade) to relieve his miscellaneous force in the captured trench. All this took some hours. The night was already advanced when they reached the 7th Division. By the time the Queen's were ready to move off under Colonel Stephens' leadership it was long past midnight; and far away in the front line the last ill-turn of fortune was about to be played.

The
Counter-attack.

The enemy had no intention of giving up his trench without a further struggle. It was not as though a complete sector had been taken from him. He was secure in his original front line on either side of a trifling breach. Under cover of darkness he could attack frontally from Rouges Bancs and, at the same time, he could bomb in from both flanks. Satisfied by his experiences earlier in the day that he had a formidable adversary to encounter, who could not be dealt with by an haphazard or half-hearted approach, he took time to organize a carefully planned minor operation involving three converging and simultaneous attacks. About two hours after midnight, when the senses of the defenders must inevitably have been dulled by fatigue—most of them had been fighting since daylight on the previous morning—a strong force of German infantry suddenly charged the trench from the front, and at the same moment heavy bombing broke out on either flank. The frontal attack was met with machine-gun and rifle fire, and brought to a standstill. But the bombs of the defenders gave out; the blocks at either end of the trench were carried by the enemy; and the flanks were driven in. A fierce hand-to-hand struggle raged up and

down the trench, the severity of which may be gauged from a letter written by a Roman Catholic Priest serving in the ranks of the German Army.*

"After two hours' fighting," he writes, "the enemy was beaten back. You can scarcely have an idea of the work this represented. How these Englishmen had in twelve hours dug themselves in! The hundred fellows who were in our trenches had brought with them an enormous quantity of ammunition, a machine gun and one they had captured from us. . . . Almost every single man of them had to be put out of action with hand grenades. They were heroes all, brave and true to the end, until death . . . men of the 'active English Rifles Brigade.' . . ."

By three in the morning it was all over. A few remnants of the Battalion had escaped and made their way back. Fifty were overpowered and taken prisoner. Thirty wounded were picked up next day by the enemy. The remainder of the garrison were dead. And Colonel Stephens arrived with the Queen's to relieve his battalion, to find that he had no battalion left to relieve. Not one company officer remained. Captain Isaac, who had rejoined for the battle, was missing, together with four other officers. The others were all killed or wounded.† Captain R. C. J. Chichester-Constable, the adjutant, who had been lamed early in the day, and 2nd-Lieutenant Gray, with less than two hundred men, were all that remained. Seventy-seven N.C.O.'s and Riflemen were officially reported killed, three hundred and forty wounded, and two hundred and twelve missing. But of the missing, the greater number were missing for ever. It is estimated that less than a hundred were taken prisoners, and of these some thirty were wounded. The remainder were killed.

Sergeant A. Starr of the machine-gun section, and Riflemen G. Jones, J. Watkinson and A. T. Windibank ("C" Company) and W. Denton ("A" Company) won the Distinguished Conduct Medal, all for feats of outstanding

* He was killed in action subsequently, and the letter was found on his body and forwarded to Intelligence by whom it was given to a British War Correspondent, Mr. Valentine Williams, subsequently an officer in the Irish Guards.

† The Battalion went into action with twenty-one company officers. Nine were killed, seven wounded and five missing. All the missing were subsequently discovered to have been killed or to have died of wounds.

Names of Officer casualties:

Killed.

Capt. S. A. Sherston.
Capt. P. A. Kennedy.
Capt. A. K. Hargreaves.
Lieut. E. H. Leigh.
2nd-Lieut. Hon. H. R. Hardinge.
2nd-Lieut. T. F. E. Stanhope.
2nd-Lieut. H. P. Clarke.
2nd-Lieut. G. P. Cable.

Missing.

Capt. J. E. V. Isaac.
Capt. Werner.
Lieut. Watney.
2nd-Lieut. Sir W. G. Hoste, Bt.
2nd-Lieut. R. S. Pearce.

gallantry. Sergeant Starr fought his gun till the whole detachment were casualties. Then, having been captured, he escaped and, though wounded in the act, got back to the Battalion. Rifleman Jones and Windibank carried back messages across the open under fire. The former was three times wounded; the latter not only made good his return but helped to fight a captured German machine gun. Rifleman Denton, when the garrison was without bombs, went out into the open and collected them from the wounded. Rifleman Watkinson, to eke out the same shortage, caught German bombs as they came over and threw them back again. He was badly wounded in the hand by the explosion of one of these. 2nd-Lieutenant Gray's resource and courage was rewarded with the Military Cross. The following were mentioned in despatches for their work at Neuve Chapelle and on May 9th: Lieut.-Colonel R. B. Stephens; Major C. E. Harrison; Captains T. J. Fitzherbert-Brockholes and S. A. Sherston; Lieutenants Hon. H. R. Hardinge, E. H. Leigh and T. P. Pilcher; Quarter-master-Sergeant A. Hard; Corporals C. R. Garner, A. Woolnough, and J. G. Moore; and Riflemen H. Carpenter, H. Hilliam, E. J. Jolley and W. Munson. Rifleman Hilliam also received the Medal of St. George 4th Class. Lieutenant Maclean, the Battalion Medical Officer, was mentioned in despatches, and awarded the Military Cross. Colonel Stephens, in addition, was confirmed in his appointment as Brigadier-General Commanding 25th Infantry Brigade. Captain F. H. Nugent came from the Third Battalion to take command. And the Second Battalion, hurriedly reinforced from the Fifth Battalion at Minster, settled down a fortnight later to a period of trench warfare that was to last until the end of September.

The 8th Division reporting on the disaster ascribed it to the strength of the enemy's works. Such was the protection afforded by the bomb-proof shelters, impervious to all but the heaviest shells, that, from the moment when the artillery fire ceased, the enemy's parapets were lined with rifles, and his machine guns opened fire. Even during the bombardment fire had been kept up from the German strong points—an indication of their formidable nature. And new and thicker wire entanglements had been built, on which "the greater part of the guns allotted were of too small a calibre to make an impression in the time allotted."

•

CHAPTER V

THE SERVICE BATTALIONS—BOESINGHE. HOOGE. LOOS.

THE Service Battalions of the Rifle Brigade were numbered from Seven to Seventeen. Not all of these went on active service. The Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Seventeenth Battalions were originally formed as Service Reserve Battalions for the purpose of supplying drafts of reinforcements to the Service Battalions overseas, and, during 1916, they were transformed into the 19th, 20th and 112th Training Reserve Battalions, in conformity with the reorganization of training units then in progress. There were formed in addition seven Territorial Battalions, which, however, beyond the name, had little association with the Regiment, and were employed, such as left the United Kingdom, on garrison duties in Egypt. For the purpose of this history, therefore, the Service Battalions must be taken to mean the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth in the 14th (Light) Division, the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth in the 20th (Light) Division, the Thirteenth in the 37th Division, and the Sixteenth in the 39th Division.

The
Light Divisions. The idea of forming two divisions of English Rifle and Light Infantry Regiments was particularly happy. In addition to the Rifle Brigade the British Army is fortunate in possessing (apart from Scottish and Irish Rifle and Light Infantry Regiments) the King's Royal Rifle Corps (the famous 60th Rifles), the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (the 43rd and 52nd), the Somerset Light Infantry, the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the Durham Light Infantry and the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry, some of whom, like the Rifle Brigade, can look back to a comradeship begun in Craufurd's Light Brigade at Corunna ; and all of whom are well adapted by regimental custom and outlook to pull together in harness. The 14th (Light) Division of the First Hundred Thousand was composed of three Battalions each of the Rifle Brigade and 60th together with one battalion each of the English Light Infantry Regiments. This permitted the creation of one Green-jacket Brigade, the 41st, composed of the Seventh and Eight Battalions

of the Rifle Brigade and the 7th and 8th Bns. of the 60th. The 42nd Brigade contained the Ninth Battalion Rifle Brigade, the 9th Bn. of the 60th, the 5th Bn. Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire L.I. and the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I. The 43rd Brigade had the 10th Bn. Durham Light Infantry, the 6th Bn. Somerset L.I., the 6th Bn. D.C.L.I., and the 6th Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. The formation of the Division was an immediate success. Recruits flocked to such famous Regiments. Lord Kitchener's recruiting appeal for the New Armies was published on August 7th. By the beginning of September the Rifle Brigade Battalions of the 14th Division were two thousand five hundred strong. Sanction was given on September 11th for the formation of a second Light Division—the 20th. The gigantic battalions of the 14th Division were drawn up at Aldershot. Company officers were told to fall out half their men to form the new battalions. Within a few hours the material of the 20th (Light) Division was ready for its officers and instructors. "About 6 p.m. one evening I was drilling with 'D' Company of the Eighth Battalion," writes Captain C. E. Jesser-Davis, who joined the regiment on September 4th on arriving from Ceylon, "when I was sent to take command of 'C' Company of the Eleventh Battalion. I found three hundred and twenty men and boys in every variety of civilian attire, mostly rather shabby (though one man was in possession of a white collar), waiting in the road with their newspaper parcels under their arms, and had to get them into the very limited accommodation allotted to me—one barrack room and two or three bell tents."

The 20th Division was formed on the model of the 14th, with one Green-jacket Brigade (the 59th) composed of the Tenth and Eleventh Battalions of the Rifle Brigade and the 10th and 11th Battalions 60th. The 60th Brigade was made up of the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire L.I., the 6th Bn. K.S.L.I., the 12th Bn. 60th Rifles and the Twelfth Battalion Rifle Brigade. In the 61st Brigade there were the 11th Bn. D.L.I., the 7th Bn. Somerset L.I., the 7th Bn. D.C.L.I. and the 7th Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. Subsequently, in order to make a pioneer battalion of the Durham miners who had thronged to the 11th Bn. D.L.I., that unit was taken out of the 61st Brigade and replaced by the 12th Bn. of the King's Liverpool Regt.

The Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions came into existence on August 21st—the Seventh and Eighth Battalions sharing first Malplaquet and later Oudenarde Barracks at Aldershot. There was an immediate rush of recruits to be dealt with, to meet which all available Regular and Special Reserve Officers and N.C.O.'s from the S.R. Battalion were sent as Instructors. No rifles were available till late in October, but squad drill, marching and physical training provided ample occupation for the men. The Regular Officers and N.C.O.'s were more than delighted with

the material on which they had to work. After six weeks, squad drill was a thing of the past, and the companies were out at field work. The keenness of the men knew no bounds. They were told they might hope to go to France early in the New Year; and that promise was enough to *gild* the weariest fatigue. By November they were on the Ash and Pirbright ranges astonishing their instructors by the excellence of their shooting. Early in the New Year they were far advanced in their training. In May the Division, under Major-General V. A. Couper, late of the Rifle Brigade, was ready to leave for France.

Meanwhile the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions who came into being about the middle of September, when their detachment from the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions was made effective, were hard on the heels of the First Hundred Thousand. By January they were firing their first musketry courses at Blackdown. "Only two companies were able to fire at a time owing to shortage of rifles," writes Lieut.-Colonel A. E. Cotton of the Eleventh Battalion, who began the War as a Private Rifleman in the Tenth Battalion, and by January was commanding a company in the Tenth. "Rifles had to be handed from one detail to another." But in spite of difficulties of this kind and the bitterly cold weather, the standard of shooting was high. In February the battalions had the experience of a move by road to Witley Camp. It was typical February weather, cold, with pouring rain, and blustering winds. Khaki had not yet been issued; the clothing was thin and comfortless. The camp was found to be a quagmire. The huts let in the weather. "In spite of everything the battalion's* cheerfulness never failed." At the end of March the 20th Division moved to Salisbury Plain. A similar story of difficulties cheerfully surmounted constitutes the early experience of the remaining Service Battalions.

On May the 19th and 20th 1915, the 14th (Light) Division proceeded to France and joined the V Corps of the Second Army in the Ypres Salient. The Division did not move directly into the line; this was hardly to be expected. Infantry Brigades were sent one at a time to the 46th (South Midland) Territorial Division for practical instruction in trench warfare. The Seventh Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel J. D. Heriot-Maitland, D.S.O.) and the Eighth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel R. C. Maclachlan) were attached for a week's instruction on May 28th—the Seventh being split up between the 5th Bn. Lincolnshire (T.F.) Regt. and the 4th Bn. Leicestershire (T.F.) Regt. whilst the Eighth was divided between the 2nd/6th and 1st/5th Bns. North Staffordshire Regt. and the 2nd/6th and 1st/5th Bns. South Staffordshire Regt.

* The Eleventh Battalion.

The Eighth Battalion made a strongly favourable impression on Brevet-Major W. La Touche Congreve, who, if any individual can claim to be the hero of the Regiment, undoubtedly has that distinction. Before his untimely death on July 20th 1916, when Brigade-Major in a Highland Division, he had won all the decorations for bravery that an officer can receive. He possessed the Victoria Cross, the D.S.O., the Military Cross and the Legion of Honour (Croix de Chevalier). The praise of so brilliant a soldier was worth having. In Major Congreve's private diary there is the following passage on the Eighth Battalion:

"Saturday May 29th. I rode off to look for Ronnie * who is now out here commanding the 8th Battalion which is in the 14th Division. Eventually I found him in a farm between Neuve Eglise and Bailleul. I much admired the general appearance of the good riflemen. They may be new but they look splendid and have such a fine lot of officers."

The Ninth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel W. D. Villiers-Stuart, the 5th Gurkha Rifles) served its apprenticeship a week later with 1st/5th Bn. North and 1st/5th Bn. South Staffordshire Regt. Meanwhile the 41st (Greenjacket) Brigade had taken over trenches from the 85th Brigade, 28th Division, the Eighth Battalion going into the line on June 7th just south of St. Eloi, with Battalion Headquarters in the Brasserie south of Voormezele, whilst the Seventh Battalion was in Brigade reserve at Pioneer Farm near Dickebusch. It was not long before the Eighth Battalion was "blooded." Lieutenant A. A. Hooker was wounded on the following day—the first casualty to the Service Battalions of the Regiment in their own trenches.† On the 10th the Seventh Battalion relieved the Eighth. This in a sense was only a "try out." The 41st Brigade was under the 28th Division. The 14th Division had not yet taken over a Divisional Sector. On June the 13th the 84th Brigade relieved the Greenjackets, who moved back to Poperinghe in V Corps Reserve. The Ninth Battalion, in the 42nd Brigade, having completed its schooling in trench warfare, was brought forward on the 16th to the ramparts of Ypres, where the Greenjacket Brigade was already assembled in reserve to an attack by the 3rd Division.

Three days later the Ninth Battalion went into the line, relieving the 1st Bn. Gordon Highlanders of the 8th Brigade, 3rd Division. It was immediately called upon to participate in active operations by lending "C" Company and the bombers to the 5th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks L.I. The attack was a failure, as, with new troops, a minor operation, so

* Col. Maclachlan.

† The Ninth Battalion had a few casualties whilst it was undergoing instruction in trench-warfare methods.



MAJOR W. LA T. CONGREVE, V.C., D.S.O., M.C.

greatly more difficult than a pitched battle, must almost necessarily have been. But it was a valuable object lesson to the Battalion, which paid in casualties for its knowledge. Lieutenant H. C. Benson and 2nd-Lieutenant B. Rissick and ten other ranks were killed, twenty-three other ranks were wounded and five were missing. By now the relief of the 3rd Division by the 14th (Light) Division was complete. The trenches were in Railway Wood. The Battalions quickly settled down to trench warfare, showing the same keenness and proficiency in learning their work as had distinguished them in the days of training.

On July 5th the Eighth Battalion, after a short bombardment, was rushed in its trenches by the enemy who blew in the advance barrier, burying two sergeants and Lieutenant A. R. Backus, the platoon commander. Fully twenty Germans succeeded in getting into the trench in the confusion that followed. But the North Staffordshire Territorials were on the left flank, and their bombing officer hurried into the Eighth Battalion trench, whilst the platoon commander was being dug out, and helped to organize a counter-attack. Lieutenant Backus and the North Staffordshire officer led the counter-attack together. The latter unfortunately was killed; but the attack was completely successful, the intruders being driven out with bomb and bayonet. The Service Battalions of the 14th Division may from now be said to have undergone their baptism of fire. And it is time to return to the fortunes of the Regular Battalions of the Regiment.

The Fourth Battalion was still quietly occupying the trenches at Bois Grenier. On June 8th, half of "A" Company under Lieutenant H. C. Costobadie crawled out and attacked a German sap head—killing five of the enemy. The Third Battalion was in the line to the north of St. Jean in the Ypres Salient. Lord Henniker, whose health broke down, was relieved in command by Lieut.-Colonel R. Pigot. The Second Battalion had moved north from Laventie, when the 8th Division relieved the West Riding Division in front of Fleurbaix. Meanwhile the First Battalion was preparing to carry out an extremely difficult minor operation.

The
First Battalion.
International
Trench.

This enterprise is instructive for two reasons. In the first place it is a brilliant example of organization by a subordinate commander and of careful adherence to the commander's plan by the troops engaged. Moreover, from the larger point of view, it furnishes a complete condemnation of the methods of local attack practised both by the Allied and the German Armies in the early years of the War. Local attacks upon unstabilized positions will always be justified and may be imperative, as for instance in the case of the Fourth Battalion's remarkable achievement at St. Eloi in March. But, as shown by the development of the action at Fromelles in

May, and now demonstrated again at Boesinghe, local attacks undertaken with the intention of retaining the ground gained (as distinguished from raids where the trench was hurriedly ransacked and the attackers fell back immediately upon their original line) were, against the closely organized positions and high standard of supporting fire power attained by both sides in the Great War, so costly as to be prohibitive.

The First Battalion was now on the extreme left of the British Army, a position exactly appropriate to a regiment whose post of honour on ceremonial occasions is on the left of all the fighting troops. On the Centenary of Waterloo (June 18th 1915) the Battalion was already in that position and at midnight the Commanding Officer (Colonel Seymour) was actually the left-hand man of the British line. He had gone forward for the express purpose of fulfilling that rôle. North of the First Battalion, the French held the west bank of the Yser Canal, from a point five hundred yards south of the Boesinghe Railway bridge. The Ypres Salient, however, overlapped the French line by some two hundred yards, and "E" Trench, the northern point of the Salient, actually began three hundred yards south of the bridge between the east bank of the Canal and the small parallel watercourse beyond it. "E" Trench ran parallel to the Canal for three hundred yards when it bent east towards the Cinq Chemins Estaminet-Boesinghe road (joining successively "G" and "J" Trenches) and ran gradually uphill, crossing the road a hundred yards west of its junction with the Lancashire Farm-Zouave House road. Thence the trench ran back towards Lancashire Farm as far as the road junction (which was the Battalion boundary) whence it swung away in a general south-easterly direction, crossing the Pilckem-Ypres road just east of Fusilier Farm, and ran, via Turco Farm and Admiral's Road, to Wieltje.

There may be a tendency to suppose that, so near to the bank of a canal, the country would be of unbroken flatness, especially in the great plain of Flanders. In fact that is not the case. The country is devoid of prominent features, other than the artificial canal bank, which in places is as much as fifteen feet high. But between the Canal bank and Pilckem, a distance of just a mile, there is a rise of more than fifty feet, of which the first twenty or so is met within a quarter of a mile of the canal, not a steep gradient on a walking tour, but a commanding eminence on a modern battlefield. The British front line from its most northerly point ran for five hundred yards along low ground, practically canal level. Then it began to mount the ten-metre contour,* rising to fifteen just before crossing the Boesinghe road, and maintaining roughly that level to the neighbourhood of Turco Farm, when it crossed the twenty-metre contour, dipping down to fifteen at

* It must be remembered that at Boesinghe the Canal is five metres above sea-level.

Algerian Cot, rising again to twenty and then twenty-five along Admiral's Road, and finally reaching thirty-two metres (roughly one hundred feet) just south of Wieltje. The German line which followed the east bank of the Canal from the north as far as Boesinghe Railway bridge, ran back along the north side of the railway embankment to within one hundred yards of the level crossing, crossed the railway and ran just above the ten-metre contour (conforming to the Boesinghe road) as far as the track junction just south of Farm 14, where the contour swings back towards the road, making a little dip in the ground. Here the main German defences swung back in conformity with the contour, but the front trench ran forward down the little gully and up the far side, parallel to the British front line and less than fifty yards away from it. Two trenches ran back sharply from this front trench to the main German system beyond the road, but the front trench ran on, ending abruptly about fifty yards from the British trench which now came forward to run up to the cross-roads. In the readjustment of the line, during the Second Battle of Ypres the old French front line had been lost to the enemy and the second line had become the front line. A communication trench which now ran through No-man's-land linked the two systems and ran from the British trench to the dead end of the German trench. Both sides maintained posts in this, separated by one barricade. The locality was known, for a reason that may be easily guessed, as International Trench.

Beyond the road the German line mounted the fifteen-metre contour, followed it across the Lancashire Farm road, two hundred and fifty yards north of the cross-roads (taking in the slightly higher ground of Fortin 17 en route), ran south-east to the twenty-metre contour, crossed the Boesinghe road five hundred yards from Cinq Chemins Estaminet, and ran on, side by side with the British line and anything from fifty to two hundred yards away from it. A study of the map shows that the German line in this neighbourhood was in reality a series of defended localities linked up by trenches, rather than a continuous trench system such as the British. The nature of the country that the Germans were holding was such as to favour the system of their choice. From the Pilckem Ridge down to the Canal bank, the gentle slope was dotted with farm buildings and cottages so admirably placed in relation to each other that their sites could hardly have been improved upon had they been selected with a view to defence in depth. In the front-line system between the railway and the Cinq Chemins Estaminet there were five main defended localities each based upon a strong point—The Railway Embankment; Farm 14; Fortin 17; Kiel Cot; and Mauser Cot (on the high ground in front of the Estaminet). Each of these localities had its complete network of front-line, support and com-

munication trenches grouped round the nucleus, the strong point—which was a machine-gun nest. Moreover the configuration of the ground had made it possible so to site the line that the points could be mutually supporting from south to north. International Trench, it should be added, was the western outpost of the Farm 14 locality and also of Fortin 17. Farm 14, and Fortin 17, derived their names from the hillocks on which they stood.

Some six hundred yards in rear of the front-line positions, with uncompleted trenches around them, there were the second-line defences of Zouave House, House 10, Gallwitz Farm and Mackensen Farm—all above the fifteen-metre contour. In rear again, above the twenty-metre contour, there was a clump of strong points: Villa Gretchen, Boche House and Sapeur House: the outskirts of the village of Pilckem. Behind that, on the twenty-four-metre contour (roughly seventy-eight feet above sea-level and sixty feet above the Canal) was Pilckem village, with a natural fortification formed by the road triangle. It is by now evident that the German position at the north end of the Salient was more than ordinarily strong, and that no attack upon it could be inexpensively carried out, unless it could be made upon such a scale as to sweep up to Pilckem in one operation; or unless sufficient artillery fire could be maintained to neutralize the supporting points not only until the selected sector of front line had been captured, but also until it had been consolidated and incorporated in the British front-line system with proper communication trenches dug to the rear; and unless furthermore such a counter-battery bombardment could be maintained as would protect the attacking and consolidating forces until their task had been completely carried out.

The selection of International Trench for the operation of the First Battalion was, in a sense, the choice of the French. Shortly before the 4th British Division took over the line in that locality, Colonel Dechiselle of the Zouaves, commanding the Zwaanhof Farm Sector, planned an operation for the capture of Fortin 17. The whole essence of his plan was a surprise attack to be delivered by night in complete silence, without artillery preparation. At zero (2 a.m. on the night June 5th/6th), apprised of the hour by one blast on a horn, the "Aymet" battalion of the 2nd Zouaves, wearing white neckerchiefs for mutual identification, and accompanied by two machine-gun sections and by sappers, would rush the enemy's position. An artillery barrage would fall north and east of the Fortin, upon the signal of four white rockets fired by the battalion commander. In this plan no provision was made for cutting the wire: perhaps at that date the wire was insufficient to call for it. The operation in any case was never carried out, being anticipated by the handing over of the sector. But, with other trench stores, Colonel Dechiselle's plan was duly handed over.

On June 17th the Second Army wrote to the VI Corps in these terms : " In order to improve the tactical situation on the left of your line and at the same time to distract the enemy's attention from the vicinity of Hooze, the Army Commander desires that you will consider the feasibility of seizing the small hill (14) and the Farm House * in C. 7 a. and c. on the east bank of the Canal." The Army Commander suggested that the operation be undertaken during the following week and asked for plans. VI Corps, mindful of Colonel Dechiselle's unfulfilled intention, turned up the plan and discovered that " Colonel Dechiselle was of opinion that Fortin 17 would have to be captured and consolidated before Farm 14 could be dealt with." Accordingly, on June 19th, VI Corps wrote to 4th Division enclosing Colonel Dechiselle's plan for an attack on the ground now held by the 11th Brigade, and ordering the Division to prepare a plan of attack in that sector, in conformity with the Army Commander's wishes. Second Army on learning that the attack would take place on June 26th, directed the VI Corps to be prepared to make a further attack on July 3rd in the vicinity of Verlorenhoek beyond Potijze, in conjunction with an attack by V Corps in the neighbourhood of Bellewaarde Lake. Major-General H. F. M. Wilson, the 4th Divisional Commander, did not disguise from the higher formations his profound uneasiness about the proposed operation. In his opinion the tactical situation on the left could only be satisfactorily improved by undertaking a larger operation " entailing the capture of the whole German Salient " (that is, from Fortin 17 to Farm 14 inclusive) which, with the troops at his disposal, was out of the question. The Division had been constantly engaged since April 25th ; its losses had been severe ; it was short of senior officers, and was not in a condition to make attacks on a large scale. He would greatly have preferred to gain ground more slowly and less expensively by sapping and mining forward. But in view of the necessity of distracting the enemy's attention, he undertook, with some misgivings, to attack and capture the enemy's defences west of the Cinq Chemins Estaminet-Boesinghe road. General Prowse, the 11th Brigade Commander, selected the First Battalion to make the attack, adopted with slight modifications the plan of Colonel Seymour, and placed the Somerset Light Infantry under his command for purposes of consolidation. The operation, however, was postponed into July ; when, hearing of the cancellation of the V Corps operations to the south, General Wilson, on June 30th, addressed to VI Corps what amounted to a reasoned protest against the enterprise, considering it his duty " to point out to you the circumstances under which I conceived this plan." He recapitulated his former arguments ; pointed out the difficulty created by the fact that the narrow

* Farm 14.

space between the enemy's trench and the Canal gave insufficient depth to the attacking troops; and reminded the Corps that he had previously proposed to gain ground by mining and sapping forward, and had only put forward the plan of attack in view of the necessity for a demonstration to distract the enemy's attention from operations in the neighbourhood of Hooge.

"I have every confidence," he continued, "that the operation if undertaken will succeed—but it will probably be at a loss heavier to ourselves than the Germans, and, if it is undertaken entirely with the object of improving the tactical situation on my left flank, it does not appear to me the best method of attaining the object." As the V Corps operation had been postponed, and there was no longer any pressing need to distract the enemy's attention, he urged that the project should be held over for fresh troops; and that, meanwhile, jumping-off ground should be gained by mining and sapping forward. To this letter there seems to have been no reply. July 6th was fixed for the attack.

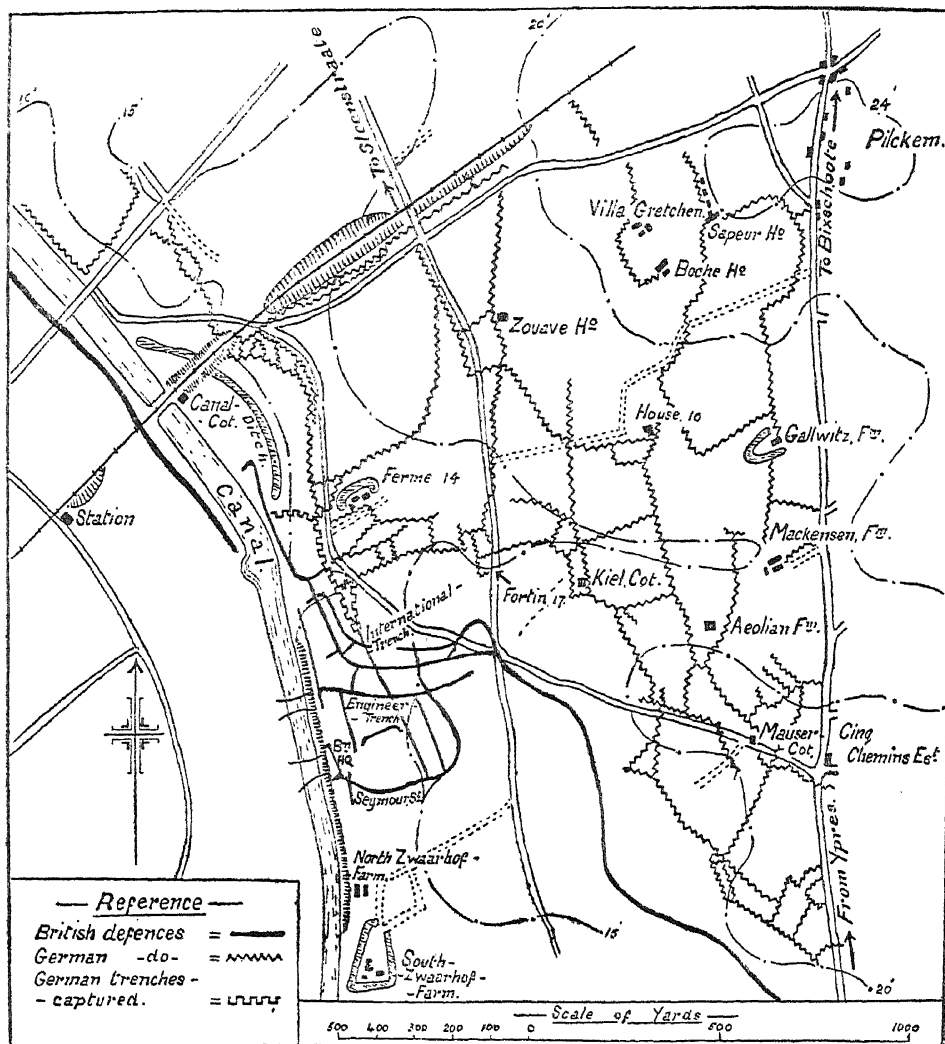
The preparations had been made in the most elaborate detail and included the emplacement of an 18-pounder gun (under Lieut. Robinson, R.F.A.) in the front-line trench to engage the enemy in the Farm and the Fortin over open sights. But nevertheless Major-General Wilson's forebodings as to the casualties were realized from the moment of the advance. At 6 a.m. the assaulting companies, "C" (Captain G. M. A. Ellis) on the right, "B" (Lieut. D. R. Brandt) on the left, went over the top—Captain O. C. Downes, the second in command, advancing with the first line in command of the attack. The distance to be traversed was less than fifty yards; but within five minutes of zero all the officers were out of action. Two (2nd-Lieuts. P. C. B. Blair and G. F. Juckes) of the officers of "C" Company were killed immediately before zero by a shell that also wounded the adjutant (Lieut. G. W. Barclay) and Company-Sergeant-Major Bradley. Lieutenant Brandt, of "B" Company, was shot through the heart on the German parapet. Captain Downes and Captain Ellis were both hit on the way across. The assaulting companies therefore gained the German trench at the cost of all their officers, except 2nd-Lieutenant C. N. C. Boyle.* Company-Sergeant-Major F. Hedges took command of "B" Company and 2nd-Lieutenant R. I. V. Birkbeck led across the remaining two platoons of "C" Company and took command on the right. Captain C. J. Gasson, who led over three platoons of "I" Company in support, took charge on the left, as soon as he arrived.

The objective of the operation was to gain and consolidate roughly one hundred yards of the Cinq Chemins Estaminet-Boesinghe road. By eleven

* He was wounded soon afterwards.

BOESINGHE.

6th July, 1915.



THE ATTACK ON INTERNATIONAL TRENCH BY THE FIRST BATTALION.

minutes after zero, "I" Company (Captain Gasson) less one platoon, despite heavy machine-gun fire from Farm 14, which wounded 2nd-Lieutenant C. L. Bullock and caused a number of other casualties, were on the objective, and two platoons under 2nd-Lieutenant C. F. C. Letts were at work digging in. This party however had passed through a trying experience, for a 9-in. howitzer shell intended for an enemy machine gun scored a direct hit on the British parapet as they were leaving and caused indescribable confusion. "A" Company, under Captain F. W. L. Gull, and the remaining platoon of "I" Company garrisoned the old British front line. A party of Royal Engineers attached for that purpose began to join up the International Trench with the old German front line; and parties of the Somerset Light Infantry began digging two communication trenches and a fire trench. But despite the hedges and some natural cover the work was directly overlooked from the Pilckem defences, whence heavy fire was opened and maintained. Meanwhile the assault had resolved itself into a number of bombing forays in which the First Battalion proved themselves too much for the enemy. The bombing officer, 2nd-Lieutenant B. Gibbs, and Sergeant P. Baynes* his assistant were both killed; but Sergeant F. Stone,* despite his inexperience of bombs, took charge with complete success.† The digging went steadily forward behind the screen of bombers, who continued to be engaged with the enemy until early on the following morning. Bombs and machine-gun ammunition were ceaselessly hurried forward and even more speedily used up.‡ The trench and dug-outs were choked with German dead and littered with letters and parcels. Evidently the mail had just arrived. Some kind of a meal had been in progress, for there was an abundance of hot coffee which was eagerly consumed by the raiders, who in addition fortified themselves with cigars. Thirty prisoners, mostly of the 215th Regiment (Schleswig-Holstein), were captured, together with two machine guns, two trench mortars and a considerable amount of trench stores. A counter-attack was attempted at about 7.30 a.m.; it was broken up by the artillery. But the enemy machine-gun fire continued with unabated accuracy and by 11 a.m. the casualties were becoming severe. Two platoons of the Somerset Light Infantry relieved part of "C" Company. The consolidation was steadily persisted in despite a second half-hearted threat of counter-attack—once again broken up by the

* Both enlisted in August, 1914, and were 5th. Bn. men. Sergt. Baynes was a well-known black and white artist.

† He was chased round three traverses by a German with a bayonet before he mastered the mechanism of a short Hales bomb, tore out the pin by the sacrifice of a front tooth, turned on his pursuer and destroyed him.

‡ When the Battalion was relieved it was met by the Brigadier, who in the course of his congratulations volunteered the information that every available bomb had been used and he had been compelled to borrow from the French.

guns. At 1 p.m. heavy shelling began. Soon afterwards there was a sharp revival of bombing by the enemy on both flanks. At 3 p.m. a more deliberate counter-attack developed on the left. It was easily driven off, but two companies of the Hampshire Regt. who had been sent forward in support were stood-to in case of emergency. By half-past three the shelling had become so severe that the old British front line had to be evacuated. The captured trenches received their share of the bombardment, under cover of which another effort was made at counter-attack on the left—the enemy endeavouring to work along a communication trench instead of advancing over the open. This attack was checked and defeated—in part by the artillery, in part by 2nd-Lieutenant C. A. Gould of the Somerset Light Infantry who, with his platoon sergeant and some of his men went to the help of a First Battalion post of three bombers, and engaged the enemy with them, whilst the remainder of the platoon worked feverishly at deepening and improving the trench. This was the last attempt at recapturing the position. Shortly after 5 p.m. the firing died down. Late at night the captured ground was handed over to the 2nd Bn. Lancashire Fusiliers. The officers and men who had been engaged were, as they had every reason to be, in high spirits over their achievement. The Brigadier professed himself to be delighted. The success of the attack was chiefly ascribed to the excellence of the plans made by Colonel Seymour and Captain Downes and to the initiative of officers and men alike—especially Captain Gasson. The Commanding Officer was promoted; Captain Downes was awarded the D.S.O.; 2nd-Lieutenants Birkbeck and Boyle received the Military Cross, A/Corporal T. Lewis the D.C.M., and Sergeant F. G. Eade, who had done good work on several previous occasions, was mentioned in despatches. Tributes to its gallantry reached the Battalion from Second Army, from VI Corps, and from General Wilson. After the action R. S. M. Lawrence acted as adjutant for a few days owing to the shortage of officers. He made a thoroughly efficient substitute.

But the gain of some seventy-five yards of ground on a frontage of three hundred yards had been made at the expense to the Somerset Light Infantry of one officer and twenty-seven other ranks killed, three officers and one hundred and two other ranks wounded and five men missing; to the First Battalion of Lieutenant Brandt, 2nd-Lieutenants Gibbs, Blair and Jukes and thirty-three other ranks killed, Captains Downes and Ellis, 2nd-Lieutenants Bullock and Boyle and one hundred and seventy-six other ranks wounded, and thirty-seven missing; and it is safe to assume that the great majority if not all of the missing were killed. Congratulations were deservedly showered upon the survivors; and

especially upon Lieutenant Robinson, R.F.A., for his handling of the 18-pounder.*

This was the last appearance of the First Battalion at Ypres until 1917. On July 9th they went back to rest at Houtkerque. Before the end of the month they were taking over from the French near Beaumont Hamel, later to be the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in the War, but at that time a quiet part of the line. Occasional patrols were the only variant to the normal trench routine. On one of these, led by 2nd-Lieutenants Letts and Johnstone, Rifleman Carey distinguished himself by acting as guide to the raiders although three times wounded. He gained the D.C.M. Except for such minor activities the First Battalion may be said to have been out of the War during the remainder of the year.

<p>July 22nd. Arrival of the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions. Hooze— Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions in Action.</p>	<p>Just at about this time—to be exact on July 22nd—the 20th (Light) Division, bringing the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions landed at Boulogne, and before the end of the month had joined the III Corps and was concentrated in the neighbourhood of Vieux Berquin in readiness to go into the line, near the old Second Battalion trenches at Laventie. But before narrating the first experiences of these three Battalions we must return to Ypres and the 14th Division in the neighbourhood of Hooze. During the month the 14th Division had extended its line southwards, taking over the Hooze trenches from the 3rd Division. In the process of this movement the 41st Brigade gave up to the 42nd Brigade their trenches near Railway Wood, and took over the new ground; the Seventh Battalion relieving the 1st Bn. Gordon Highlanders on July 22nd. As a parting gift to the incoming troops, or a final gesture of defiance to the enemy, the 3rd Division exploded a mine of such dimensions as to bring in to existence the celebrated Hooze crater, and postpone the relief for twenty-four hours owing to the condition in which it left the ground. By way of reply the enemy settled down to a steady bombardment of the crater with heavy trench mortars—necessitating the abandonment of the crater edge, a step involving the most serious consequence in the immediate future. The front-line trenches of the left battalion sector, which ran just through the outskirts of Hooze village, were known from left to right as G 10, G 4, and G 5. G 10, which was roughly parallel to the Menin Road, was the area of the left Company, G 4, and G 5, which enclosed the village of Hooze, were the province of the right Company. G 5 led from the Menin Road to the Chateau stables; G 4 met it there at an obtuse angle and ran back around</p>
---	--

* The officers of the First Battalion presented the gun with a silver plate to commemorate its achievement.

the village to the Menin Road and G 10. The crater completely cut off G 5, the left of the right Company, from G 10, the right of the left company. Touch could only be maintained by patrolling. To add to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the Germans, at 8 a.m. on the 24th, exploded a mine of their own on the left of the crater, which utterly demolished the work that had been done to repair the inroads of the trench mortars. And, whilst the working parties were laboriously striving to recreate their fortifications, the S.O.S. went up from the crater, and it was discovered that the enemy, having sapped forward to within fifteen yards of it, was delivering a bombing attack on the British front line. Artillery and bombs replied; the attack was abandoned; and on the night of the 29th, when the Eighth Battalion came up to relieve the Seventh, all was quiet, the night was dark, the relief went without a hitch, and the enemy might have been supposed to be sleeping. But he was not.

The enemy was thoroughly alive to what was taking place. It was the moment for which he had been waiting. He knew well enough that the seasoned and terrible Highlanders had been replaced by comparatively inexperienced troops. He realized that the new-comers found the craters and the mining operations a severe handicap. More than probably he knew by this time not only the identity of the Division and the fact that it belonged to the New Army, but also the composition of its Brigades and the very names of the Commanding Officers.* Perhaps he knew, though this is less likely but not at all impossible, that owing to modifications in the areas of the V and VI Corps, the usual practice of sending in one company, together with the machine guns and the bombers some hours in advance of the battalion, had been abandoned, and that all ranks of the Eighth Battalion were total strangers to the trenches and the ground. Be that as it may, he chose his moment with exact precision. He waited for completion of relief and until the outgoing battalion was comfortably at Vlamertinghe. And then, from unobtrusive little pipes passed through his parapet, he launched jet upon jet of liquid fire, at the same moment dropping a three-minutes' intense bombardment on the British front line. Then he attacked in force.

The Fate of the Eighth Battalion.	When the Eighth Battalion took over, the following dispositions were adopted. On the left "A" Company (Lieut. L. A. McAfee) had two platoons in G 10 with the remainder of the Company in support in the trench
---	---

F 2. Then came the crater with a bombers' post on either side, but other-

* The German "listening-sets" enabled the enemy to pick up all telephone messages and consequently to act with full knowledge of the British movements. Many an attack has failed for this reason; for at that period Trench codes were unknown and the Fullerphone was not invented.

wise unoccupied. The right Company "C" (Captain E. F. Prior) with three platoons in the front line and one in support, held G 4 and G 5—its left on the crater, its right, in touch with the 7th Bn. 60th, on the Menin Road. The remaining companies of the Battalion, "B" (Captain A. L. C. Cavenish) and "D" (Captain A. C. Sheepshanks), were in Zouave Wood, some five hundred yards behind the line; whilst Headquarters were at the southern end of the wood. The Battalion Reserve (1 Platoon of "B" Company) was in a supporting point south of the wood. There were four machine guns in the line* and one in the supporting point. On paper the dispositions looked well enough; but there were local conditions to cause considerable anxiety. The wire left much to be desired. But to remedy it was in truth a task of such magnitude† as to call for Brigade organization, with special R.E. assistance and working parties provided by the resting battalions. The trenches were bad. They were so deep and narrow as to make passage along them and to the rear, slow and difficult. This also should have been remedied earlier; but the Seventh Battalion had had all they could do to repair damage as it occurred without undertaking new work. Moreover the activity of the enemy's trench mortars had blown in so many trenches shown as habitable on the map, that the men were too tightly packed in the front line with consequent loss both of mobility and depth. Finally the unheld crater was a positive invitation to disaster.

The main German attack broke through at the crater and fanned outwards, left and right, bombing along the trenches. Exactly what took place will never be known, for there is no one alive to speak. "I have endeavoured," says General Nugent, "to trace witnesses who could speak as to the effect of the flame, *but have been unable to trace a man who got away from the trench.*" All that can be said is that somewhere not long before half-past three "a violent explosion took place at the stables . . . the junction of G 4 and G 5, followed by an outbreak of flame projected from the German trenches. . . . Those who were on the flank of the flame attack speak of the heat generated by the flame; and their evidence tends to indicate that it was in the nature of thick smoke, incandescent in the centre and up to about twenty to twenty-five yards from the nozzles of the projectors rather than an inflammable gas."‡ What wonder that the enemy got through! The suddenness of the attack, the terrifying surprise of its method and the unfamiliarity of the defenders with the line they had to defend, all combined to paralyse resistance. Lieutenant-Colonel G. V.

* These were taken over as "trench stores" from the Seventh Battalion—with the result that when the Seventh Battalion came up next day to take part in the counter-attack, it had no machine guns.

† Owing to the mining and trench-mortar bombardment.

‡ Report of B.G.C., 41st Brigade, on the attack. This was Brigadier-General Oliver Nugent, late 60th Rifles.

Carey, D.S.O., who was a subaltern in "A" Company, Eighth Battalion, contributes the following account.

"The 8th Battalion left Ypres by the Lille gate something after 10 p.m. on July 29. 'A' Company was commanded by Lieutenant L. A. McAfee, an old Cambridge Rugger Blue, beloved of both officers and men; he was also in charge of No. 1 Platoon (we had lost our original company commander a week or so earlier at Railway Wood—the first officer of the Battalion killed). I commanded No. 2 Platoon, Lieutenant M. Scrimgeour No. 3 and 2nd-Lieutenant S. C. Woodroffe No. 4. 'A' Company was to hold the line on the left of the crater, with my platoon on the right of our sector holding up to the left edge of the crater. No. 4 Platoon was on my left, and Nos. 1 and 3 in a trench running parallel to No. 4's bit, a few yards in rear of it. 'C' Company (Captain E. F. Prior) was to hold the line on the right of the crater; Keith Rae commanded a platoon in this company and I'm pretty sure his platoon's sector was that nearest the right-hand edge of the crater. 'B' Company (Captain A. L. C. Cavendish) and 'D' Company (Captain A. C. Sheepshanks) were in support, in trenches at the near edge of Zouave Wood.

"I remember having a strong presentiment as I plodded up to the line that night that I should never come back from it alive; in the event I was the only officer in my company to survive the next twenty-four hours.

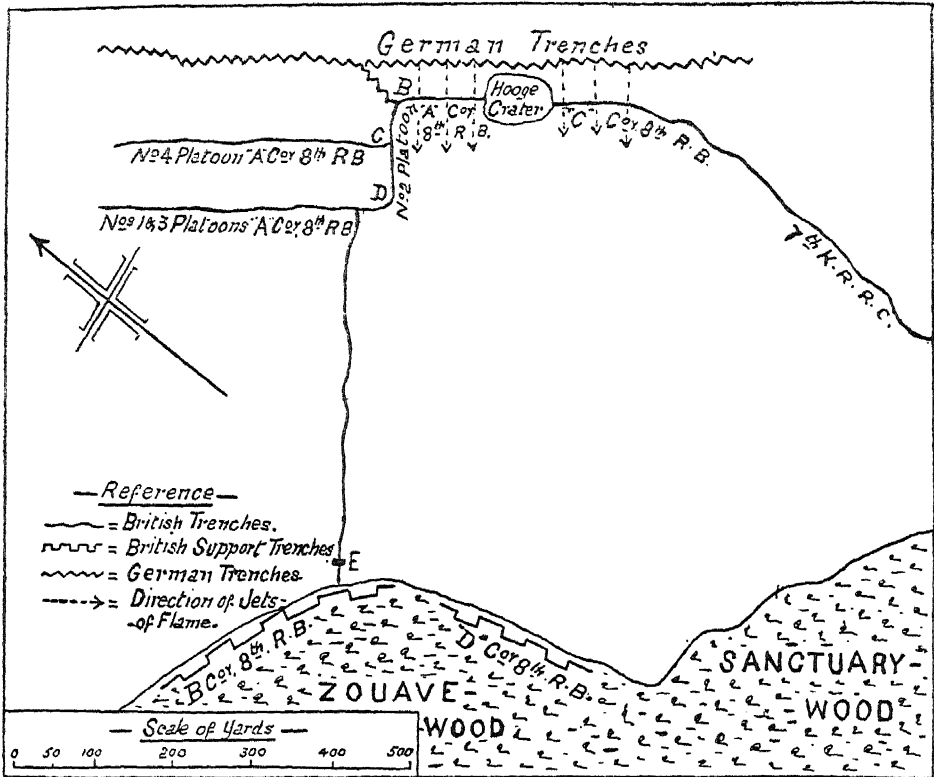
"The relief was complete shortly after midnight. It had been rather a tiring business, for we had had two or three miles to cover before the line was reached, with the delays inevitable to troops moving over strange ground in the dark; and the difficulty of getting our men into the broken-down trenches while the 7th Battalion were getting out of them was even greater here than we had found elsewhere. I had warned my men of the need for silence, owing to the nearness of the Boche, and I remember when the time came feeling certain that the tramp of feet and the clatter of rifles must have given the show away (I need not have worried—we knew afterwards that the Boche learned from more reliable sources when a relief was to take place). Indeed, the night was ominously quiet. There had been very little shelling on the way up—for which we were duly thankful; but the absence of the sniper's bullet as we filed up the communication trench from Zouave Wood was something more surprising. The continued silence after we got into the line became uncanny. About an hour after we were settled in and the last of the 7th Battalion had disappeared into the darkness, I decided that a bomb or two lobbed over into the Boche trench running close to mine near the crater might disturb him if he were up to mischief there. (It should be mentioned here that in these early days of bombs there was only a limited number of men in each battalion who

could use them, and these were organized as a squad under a single officer. Their disposition over the battalion sector and their supply of bombs was under the supervision of the Battalion bombing officer, who on this night had begun his rounds on the 'C' Company sector and had not yet reached mine. I had in the meanwhile posted a few bombers attached to my platoon at what I considered the vital spots, the point where my trench joined the crater, and Point B. Our supply of bombs was small, though more were expected to be up before daylight.) Accordingly I got one of the bombers to throw over a hand grenade; it looked to carry about the right length and it exploded well. We waited; no reply. At short intervals he sent over two more. 'This ought to rouse them,' we said; again no reply. There was something sinister about this.

"It was now about half an hour before dawn, and just then the order for the usual morning 'stand-to' came through from the Company Commander. I started on the extreme right of my bit of the line, to ensure that all my men were lining the trench, with their swords fixed. Working down gradually to the Point B, I decided to go on along the stretch of trench which bent back from the German line almost in the form of a communication trench; there were servants and some odd men from my platoon in so-called shelters along here, and I wanted to make sure that these people, who are apt to be forgotten at 'stand-to,' were all on the alert. Just as I was getting to the last of these (Point D in plan), there was a sudden hissing sound, and a bright crimson glare over the crater turned the whole scene red. As I looked I saw three or four distinct jets of flame—like a line of powerful fire-hoses spraying fire instead of water—shoot across my fire-trench (see dotted lines in plan). How long this lasted it is impossible to say—probably not more than a minute; but the effect was so stupefying that, for my own part, I was utterly unable for some moments to think collectedly. I remember catching hold of a rifle with fixed sword of a man standing next to me and making for Point B, when there was a terrific explosion, and almost immediately afterwards one of my men, with blood running down his face, stumbled into me, coming from the direction of the crater. He was followed by one or two others, most of them wounded. The minenwerfer had started, and such men as had survived the liquid fire were, in accordance with orders, giving the crater a wide berth. Then broke out every noise under Heaven! 'Minnie' and bombs in our front trench, machine guns from places unseen, shrapnel over the communication trenches and the open ground between us and the support line in Zouave Wood, and high-explosive on the wood and its vicinity. It was impossible to get up the trench towards the crater while men were coming down in dribblets, so I got out of the trench to the right of Point C to try and get

HOOGE.

30th July, 1915.



THE GERMAN "LIQUID FIRE" ATTACK ON THE EIGHTH BATTALION
AND
THE COUNTER-ATTACK OF THE SEVENTH AND NINTH BATTALIONS.

(With special reference to Colonel Carey's narrative.)

a better idea of the situation. I was immediately hit in the right shoulder by a shrapnel bullet, but I didn't have time to think much about it ; still less did I realize that it was to prove my salvation. The first thing I saw was men jumping over the edge of the crater into 'C' Company's trench. It was still the grey light of dawn and for some moments I could not distinguish whether they were Boche or British ; but, deciding soon that they must be Boche, I told the few survivors of my platoon, who by that time had joined me, to open fire on them, which they promptly did. At this point McAfee came up, followed by Michael Scrimgeour, and we had a hurried consultation. By this time the Boches were in my bit of trench as well, and we saw that my handful couldn't get back into it. It was a death-trap to stay where we were, under a shrapnel barrage ; so Mac, after weighing the possibility of going for the Boche across the open with the bayonet, reluctantly gave the order for me to get the remnant of my platoon back to the support line, and said that he and Michael would follow with the rest of the company. About a dozen men of No. 2 Platoon were all that I could find—those who had faced the flame attack were never seen again—and we started back over the open. I doubt if we could have found the communication trench if we had wanted to, but for the moment there was open fighting to be done (we had no reason to suppose that the Germans were coming no farther than our front line). A retirement is a miserable business, but there can be nothing but praise for the conduct of the men in this one ; there was nothing approaching a 'run,' and at every few yards they lay down and fired with the coolness of an Aldershot field day at any Boches who could be seen coming over into our line. There was a matter of four hundred yards of open ground to be covered under a regular hail of machine-gun and shrapnel fire, and I have always marvelled how anyone got over it alive ; as it was, most of my fellows were wounded during that half-hour's retirement, if not before, and one was shot dead within a yard of me while in the act of firing. Eventually, I (literally) fell into the main communication trench about twenty yards ahead of the support line (at Point E) ; it must have been then about 4.30 a.m. Here I was joined almost at once by Cavendish (O.C. 'B' Coy.), who, on learning that our front line was lost, suggested that we should there and then build a barricade in the communication trench—it was still expected that the Boche would come on. My small party set to, using sandbags from the side of the trench, and a supply of bombs came up while we were working. It was rather ticklish work when it came to the upper part of the barricade, as the Boche was using shrapnel very accurately, and there were a lot of rifle and machine-gun bullets flying about. But the men in the support trenches behind us were having a worse time, for Zouave Wood was being



SECOND-LIEUTENANT S. C. WOODROFFE, V.C.

heavily bombarded and 'B' and D' Companies were 'suffering a lot of casualties. During this time, Mac, having got his survivors back to the supports, came up to see how I had fared. He was very cool, but terribly unhappy at our losses of men and ground; and especially at having been unable to get into touch with Woodroffe. I was thankful at finding him safe, and still more so to learn that Michael also was all right. He went off almost at once to reorganize the remainder of the company. We continued to stand by our barricade, and I borrowed a rifle and tried to do a bit of sniping; the Boche could be seen throwing up the earth in our front line, and it now looked as if he were going to stay there. About this time came our first bit of consolation. Our artillery had begun to retaliate, and we could see shells bursting in our old front line; but the effort was feeble as compared with the German bombardment. Some hour and a half later Mac came back with the grievous news that Michael Scrimgeour had been killed while reorganizing his men in the wood. He also began to fuss about my wound, and eventually gave me a direct order to go back to the dressing-station. I had to go, and that was the last I saw of poor McAfee, who was killed that afternoon leading his men in a counter-attack."

The extreme right and left platoons, which were unaffected by the liquid fire, held out stoutly and repulsed all bombing attacks upon them. 2nd-Lieutenant S. C. Woodroffe, who commanded that on the left, in G 10, displayed such outstanding courage as to win the Victoria Cross—the first gained in the New Army; though he sacrificed his life to win it.* Cut off from the remainder of the Battalion and surrounded by the enemy he held off all attacks until the whole of his bomb-supply was exhausted; and then extricated his platoon in good order. But the centre had gone. The machine guns were out of action and the enemy was through Hooze and across the Menin Road, and was advancing on Zouave Wood almost before the news of the disaster had penetrated to the supporting companies. In a short time the ruins of Hooze had been skilfully converted into a whole series of machine-gun nests. And when, between four and five a.m., "B" Company attempted to counter-attack, the withering fire from Hooze held up all advance. The company succeeded however in extricating the remains of "A" Company, and its commander, Lieutenant McAfee, who, observing the progress of the counter-attack from what still remained of G 10, and finding himself almost surrounded, had fought his way over to The Culvert on the Menin Road. "C" Company on the right, despite the gallant endeavours of the platoon in G 4, was almost completely obliterated. By

* He was killed later in the day out in front of his men cutting the wire that was holding up their counter-attack.

nine a.m. what remained of the Eighth Battalion, reinforced by one company of the 60th, held a line along the northern edge of Zouave Wood.

Meanwhile the other Battalions of the Rifle Brigade had not been idle. The Ninth Battalion was in the line on the left of the Eighth. At 3.15, Colonel Villiers-Stuart saw the great jet of fire, and mistook it for a mine exploding. Then a bombardment began. The S.O.S. went up and the British guns replied. Heavy shelling continued for two hours. At half-past five the news came that the Eighth Battalion had been driven from its trenches. An officer's patrol under Lieutenant J. E. B. Gray was sent to find touch with the Eighth Battalion and found them on the north-east corner of Zouave Wood, with a battalion of the 60th in support. The Seventh Battalion at 3.45 a.m. had turned wearily into its rest camp at Vlamertinghe. An hour later it was roused with orders to stand by. At 7 a.m. it was on the road back to Ypres, halting for orders on the Kruisstraat road near the Asylum whilst Colonel Heriot-Maitland and the Adjutant went to the 41st Brigade Headquarters in the ramparts. There they were informed of a general counter-attack to take place at 2.45 p.m. after a forty-five minutes' bombardment. In this attack their rôle was to support the Eighth Battalion. So difficult was the task of advancing that it was after half-past one before the head of the Seventh Battalion reached Zouave Wood.

The decision to counter-attack by day was taken against the advice of the Brigade Commander on the spot. "In my opinion," he wired to the Division, "situation precludes counter-attack by day. Counter-attack would be into a re-entrant and would not succeed in face of enfilade fire." But the Division, in overruling his objection, replied that if no counter-attack were made the Zouave-Wood position might become untenable. They said it was essential to counter-attack as early as possible. The hour of 2.45 was chosen; and it was determined that the assault should be made by the Eighth Battalion attacking from Zouave Wood, and the 9th Bn. 60th attacking from The Culvert with the Seventh and Ninth Battalions Rifle Brigade in support. The objective was Hooze and the trenches in its neighbourhood. The attack, like almost every hastily improvised operation undertaken by either side during the whole war, was pre-doomed to failure. The utilization, in the forefront, of a spent battalion that on the top of the heavy fatigue of a relief had been fighting throughout the remainder of the night, had obtained no rest, and had been without food and water since coming into the line was, to speak mildly, a serious error of judgment; for the quality of dash, so essential in such an operation, could hardly fail to be lacking.

But in view of the decision to attack at that hour Brig.-General Nugent had no other battalion to employ, although of the so-called battalion only one organized company remained, that of Captain Sheepshanks; so that the attack on the right resolved itself into a company operation. The instructions given to Captain Sheepshanks directed him to attack on a two-platoon front, moving into position in front of the British wire during the bombardment. The remnants of "A" and "B" Companies were to operate on the left. Of "C" Company, no trace as yet could be found. Touch was to be kept with the 7th Bn. 60th on the right. Meanwhile Lieut.-Colonel Maclachlan arranged with the Seventh Battalion that it should come up in support as soon as the attack began. The Ninth Battalion, in support of the 9th Bn. 60th, detailed Major Davis, the Battalion second in command, to go forward with the 60th in order to keep liaison.

The results were just what might have been foreseen. On the left at The Culvert where the troops were fresh, the 9th Bn. 60th gained ground at the cost of heavy casualties. Major Davis took temporary command of that battalion which held its gains and was reinforced by a platoon of the Ninth Bn. Rifle Brigade. But in the centre the operation totally failed. The jaded remnants of the Eighth Battalion could make no headway against a whirlwind of machine-gun and rifle fire from Hooge, that seemed to be quite unaffected by the bombardment.* Brig.-General Nugent makes plain the efforts that were put forward. "The men showed no hesitation in following their officers; and the officers sacrificed themselves in a devotion to duty to which no words can adequately do justice." Captain Sheepshanks and his company were brought to a standstill half-way to the objective; and the remainder fared no better on the left. Meanwhile the Seventh Battalion on emerging from Zouave Wood, in support, found themselves up against their own uncut barbed wire, and were saluted with heavy machine-gun fire from the enemy on the high ground at Hooge. Lieut.-Colonel Heriot-Maitland reported that it was impossible to advance without reinforcements; and was told to hold the line on which he stood. A counter-attack by the enemy against the ground gained at The Culvert was driven back by artillery and machine-gun fire. And so, unsatisfactorily enough, the operation ended. The battalions that had been engaged were taken out of the line that night.

The cost to the Rifle Brigade of the whole battle was sixteen officers and three hundred men in the Seventh Battalion and nineteen officers and four hundred and sixty-nine men in the Eighth Battalion, killed, wounded and missing. The Ninth Battalion suffered less heavily. Very unjust criticism was at the time directed against the battalions involved

* The Brigadier's report speaks of it as being "too much distributed and too far forward."

in the Hooge disaster. It is now generally recognized that all ranks put up a most heroic defence against completely overwhelming odds. Individual gallantry abounded. The Victoria Cross won by Lieutenant Woodroffe was gained by a splendid combination of initiative, skill and courage. His small detachment was surrounded after the flame attack but he extricated them by skilful bombing tactics. Then he rallied his party and led them forward in a gallant counter-attack against a hail of rifle and machine-gun fire and perished at their head, cutting a way through the wire entanglements in the open. Captain Sheepshanks, who throughout the day showed the finest qualities of leadership, was rewarded with the D.S.O. C.-S.-M. Baldock, Riflemen Hamilton and Hobday received the D.C.M. and Rifleman Schofield the Croix de Guerre. Rifleman Nort of the Seventh Battalion was given the D.C.M. for great gallantry in trying to save the life of Lieutenant Talbot under heavy fire. Sergeant F. Bunstead and A/Cpl. T. Brown of the Ninth Battalion each won the D.C.M. for gallantry as stretcher-bearers.

The
Third Battalion. To retake the lost ground the 6th Division was withdrawn from the line at Saint Jean, and delivered a fully prepared assault on August 9th, completely regaining all that had been lost. To this attack the Third Battalion with the 17th Infantry Brigade was in reserve. After the assault that Battalion went into the line to consolidate and hold the ground, receiving with the other units of the 17th Brigade the personal thanks of Sir Herbert Plumer, the Army Commander, for "the excellent work performed . . . during the recent operations at Hooge, and the consolidation of the position there." The Third Battalion had spent two months in the defences along Admiral's Road in front of Saint Jean and La Brique. "No one," writes the compiler of the Headquarters account, "who has ever been to Ypres wants to go there again, and the Battalion had its fair share of this unpleasant spot." Then the irrepressible good spirits of the true Rifleman bubble out suddenly. After all, things had grown dull at Armentières; whereas at Ypres—"As one Rifleman remarked, his first day in the La Brique trenches, 'It's all right; there's a bit of life about this place!'" Admittedly however the shelling was "more than most of us cared about" and one shudders at the recollections evoked by such names as "Forward Cottage," "Cross Roads Farm" and "Hill Top Farm." The move to Hooge was only a flying visit to restore the situation. The consolidation carried out by the Battalion consisted mainly in digging and building up an entirely new line; and in burying the dead. For "the trenches had ceased to exist after our very heavy bombardment of August 9th, and corpses of three or four fights during the previous month were lying about

everywhere." * At the end of August they returned to their old trenches at La Brique in close proximity to the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions, which, with the 14th Division, had now come back into the line in the same neighbourhood. At about this time A/Cpl. Brown and Rifleman Stockton won the D.C.M. for digging out three men who had been buried by a shell and dressing their wounds. They were exposed to heavy shell fire while effecting this rescue.

The Tenth,
Eleventh and
Twelfth Battalions
at Laventie.

Meanwhile the 20th (Light) Division had settled down in the line at Laventie between the Meerut Division on the right and the 8th Division on the left.

Like all New Army units, its battalions had been trained principally in open warfare by the letter of the then existing Field Service Regulations. Trench warfare and, in particular, the employment of grenades were things unknown. The use of gas masks had to be taught and the tactics of machine guns. By the middle of the month all battalions had served a course of apprenticeship under the tuition of units of the 8th and 27th Divisions (which with the 20th Division made up III Corps). The 59th (Greenjacket Brigade) now took over the right of the 8th Divisional front and held it under the command of that Division. The sector of line taken over was one very intimately associated with the Rifle Brigade, for it was the strip running from Fauquissart to Petillon, and included the trenches, held so long by the Second Battalion, in which Brig.-General Gough met with his untimely death. The line was held by the two battalions of the 60th Rifles on the left and centre, with the Eleventh Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel H. C. Petre) actually occupying the old Second Battalion trenches, on the right, and the Tenth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel St. J. D. T. Loftus) in reserve. From the very beginning the battalions of the 20th Division showed the qualities that were destined to make that Division one of the best known formations on the Western Front. The men settled down to trench life as though they had been born in the trenches. A patrol carried out on September 4th under 2nd-Lieutenant I. S. Drysdale of the Eleventh Battalion called for the congratulations not only of the Divisional but of the Corps Commander. Much of the drive and dash displayed by the 59th (Greenjacket) Brigade must, in justice, be attributed to the personality and leadership of Brig.-General C. D. Shute, the predecessor of Colonel Stephens in the command of the Second Battalion. Utterly fearless and unsparing of himself, he exacted the same qualities from officers and men alike. His huge gaunt frame was devoured by a demon of energy. Idleness in the line was unendurable to him. Monster working parties were taken out nightly to labour in the borrow-ditch or on the wire, and

* 3rd Bn. narrative.

nightly were visited by that tall striding figure, with a word of praise for good work ready on his lips and withering condemnation for a blunder. All ranks breathed more freely after he had passed by. But they knew he had made them one of the best disciplined and most efficient brigades in the British Army ; and they repaid him a year later by winning the Battle of Guillemont under his command.

Meanwhile the Twelfth Battalion * in the 60th Brigade was actually attached to the Second Battalion at Fleurbaix—each company being attached by platoons to the corresponding company of the regular battalion. The 60th Brigade came into the line towards the end of the month, the Indian Corps on the right side-stepping from Fauquissart to Mauquissait. At the same time the 8th Division relinquished to the 20th Division the sector held by the 59th Brigade : and the G.O.C. 20th Division then took command of the sector between Mauquissait and Petillon. When these rearrangements were completed the III Corps front was held by the 20th, 8th and 27th Divisions from right to left. Thus in the III Corps area there were now five Battalions of the Rifle Brigade ; and there were in all ten Battalions of the Regiment on the Western Front. One more Battalion was already in France and had graduated in trench warfare at Armentières, attached to the 37th Brigade. This Battalion, the Thirteenth † (Lieut.-Colonel C. F. Pretor-Pinney) took over trenches from the French 258th Regiment at Hannescamps early in September, bringing up the total of Rifle Brigade Battalions on active service to eleven.

These first nine months of the year 1915 had seen an almost inconceivable increase in the size of the British Army in France. From a few divisions it had grown already to a great Force more than a million strong. By September Sir John French was Commander-in-Chief of Three Armies comprising some ten Army Corps and over forty Divisions. Reinforcements were arriving daily. It seemed to General Joffre and the Field-Marshal that the time was ripe to strike a great blow with these new and excellent troops. The French it was agreed would strike in the Champagne. The British would attack on a front extending between Noeux-les-Mines (six miles north-west of Lens) and Festubert, supporting their thrust by a series of subsidiary operations along the remainder of their line. The main attack was confidently expected to make the great "break through" that was to put an end to trench warfare. The subsidiary operations were mainly designed to obtain possession of the coveted Aubers Ridge. The main attack is known as the Battle of Loos, remarkable alike for its initial success and for the tragic failure to exploit it. In this action no Battalion of the

* Commanded until September 21st by Sir M. Manningham-Buller, Bt., and afterwards by Major W. Pigott.

† 111th Brigade, 37th Division.

Regiment was engaged. By a curious coincidence, however, in each of the subsidiary operations, known respectively as the action of Piètre, the action of Bois Grenier, and the Second Attack on Bellewaarde, a Battalion of the Rifle Brigade was selected to take part.

The operations were to begin on September 25th. On that day the main attack at Loos would be launched and the subsidiary attacks farther north would also be made. The action of Piètre was to be begun by troops of the Meerut Division and by the Twelfth Battalion Rifle Brigade, whilst the remaining battalions of the 20th (Light) Division co-operated with covering fire and watched for an opportunity to advance. The action of Bois Grenier was entrusted to the redoubtable 25th Brigade of the 8th Division, which was to attack the line of forts (Bridoux Fort, The Lozenge, Angle Fort and Corner Fort) that covered Le Bridoux and Bois Blancs a mile north-west of Radinghem, with the Second Battalion Rifle Brigade, the 2nd Bn. Royal Berkshire Regt. and the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. from right to left, and the 1st Bn. Royal Irish Rifles in support. These actions were, in their first stages, to be no more than holding actions to prevent the enemy from shifting his reserves to the Loos front; but any signs of enemy demoralization were to be immediately followed up by a general advance of the whole III Corps to the Aubers Ridge from Radinghem to the two Pommereaus, including Fromelles and La Clicqueterie Farm—in fact to the exploitation objectives of the battles of Neuve Chapelle and Fromelles. The Bellewaarde attack was allotted to the 42nd Brigade of the 14th Division, with the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks L.I., the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I. and the Ninth Battalion Rifle Brigade attacking side by side, with the 9th Bn. 60th following in support. The objective was the Bellewaarde Farm position, between Railway Wood and the Menin Road, on the western slopes of the Bellewaarde spur. All these attacks were destined to prove expensive failures for the British Army, but glorious successes for the Battalions of the Regiment.

The Twelfth Battalion Attack at Piètre. The action of Piètre began at 6 a.m. on September 25th with the assault of the Meerut Division on Mauquissait. It had been preceded by a steady bombardment of four days and an intense bombardment of ten minutes, and was immediately successful. The Indians had already reached the German third line before 6.30 a.m. and were pressing on towards the Moulin du Piètre. But the attack of the Twelfth Battalion was not timed to begin with that of the Meerut Division; it was not to be launched until orders were received, the nature of which would depend on the result of the Indian attack. At 7.30 a.m. orders reached Battalion Headquarters to advance

and join up with the Meerut Division. By this time however all telephone communication with the assaulting companies was cut, and it was not until 8.25 that "D" Company (Captain G. F. Finch) received its orders and went over the top. "B" and "C" Companies (Captain L. C. F. Oldfield and Major R. E. Nott-Bower) were to follow in support, and "A" Company was to begin digging a communication trench out to the enemy front line. By 9.30 a.m., despite heavy casualties caused by enfilade machine-gun fire at short range, all three assaulting companies were in the German trenches. Two of the company commanders were out of action, for Captain Oldfield had been killed, and Major Nott-Bower had been wounded in the head.* The digging party detailed by "A" Company suffered severely and made small progress. Shortly afterwards this company was relieved by a company of the 6th Bn. K.S.L.I. and endeavoured to join the remainder of the Battalion. One platoon under Lieutenant L. C. B. Russell succeeded in making an entry into the German Line, and, having bombed down to the point where the communication trench was to join up, endeavoured to dig back to meet it. This was speedily checked by enfilade fire. The remainder of "A" Company could only get half-way across and took cover in an open ditch. Headquarters with the Commanding Officer (Lieut.-Colonel W. G. Pigott) and the adjutant (Captain R. U. H. Prioleau) moved forward to an advanced Report Centre at 8.30 a.m. No sooner had they arrived when a heavy shell burst in among them, killed the entire party with the exception of the Commanding Officer and the adjutant, and in addition wrecked the Regimental aid post, killing the corporal-in-charge, many orderlies and a number of the wounded. The Medical Officer, Captain G. Malim, R.A.M.C., was knocked senseless but recovered and continued his work single-handed. Within a few minutes another direct hit on the parapet hurled him into the air and exposed what remained of the aid post to the full view of the enemy. Nevertheless Captain Malim worked on for twenty-four hours attending single-handed to more than four hundred cases. He was awarded the V.C. and richly deserved it.

Meanwhile news came through from Captain Finch that he had taken the German third line with "D" Company, and was consolidating. Shortly afterwards Captain T. E. Holland, who had taken command of "B" Company, reported that the Indians were falling back, that his bombs had run out, and that, without reinforcement and some counter-action to the machine-gun fire from the left, it would be impossible to hold out. What had happened was what might reasonably have been foreseen. The

* He had a most remarkable escape. A shrapnel bullet penetrated his skull and lodged in his brain. He was unconscious for three weeks. But the bullet was successfully extracted and he recovered completely.

Bareilly Brigade had made a spirited attack and had carried all before it. The enemy on the right flank was sufficiently engaged with the situation from Festubert to Lens. But the left was virtually unoccupied, and engaged the attackers heavily. By the time the order had filtered through to the assaulting companies of the Twelfth Battalion, the Indians had been receiving a steadily increasing measure of attention for two and a half hours. By the time the Twelfth Battalion had battled its way across, against the furious machine-gun fire it encountered from the left, a further hour had been spent and the rot had begun to set in. It is one of the truisms of warfare that native troops, magnificent in dash, have not the staying power of Europeans. The Bareilly Brigade was dispirited and its dash had gone. The 1st Bn. Black Watch held out unmoved; but the native troops gave way. By 11.30 a.m., when a company of the Shropshires was sent forward to reinforce, the Twelfth Battalion had worked its way steadily forward almost to the Moulin du Piètre and was in touch with the Black Watch in that neighbourhood. The Indians however were retiring; the Germans were advancing in force; and the supply of bombs had given out. To make matters worse the artillery was still shelling the captured trenches in the belief that they were held by the enemy. In these circumstances the officer commanding the Black Watch informed the senior officer of the Rifle Brigade that he proposed to withdraw. There was no sensible course open except to do the same. By half-past twelve the Twelfth Battalion was back in its trenches less seven officers and three hundred and twenty-two other ranks killed, wounded and missing. The conduct of officers and men alike was in every way worthy of the best traditions of the Regiment. They were warmly thanked for their gallantry by the Divisional and Brigade Commanders.

The
Second Battalion
Attack at
Bois Grenier.

The action of Bois Grenier was planned and carried out by Brig.-General R. B. Stephens with the Brigade that he won on the field of Fromelles. His objective was the line of forts, on a twelve-hundred-yards' frontage, from Bridoux Fort to Corner Fort, both inclusive. In addition to the artillery bombardment he brought up two trench-mortar batteries into the Well Farm and Bridoux salients, and caused six 18-pounders to be dug into the front-line parapet—two in the Bridoux salient; one in the Well Farm salient; two west of Well Farm and one east of Le Bridoux—to fire direct on the enemy's parapet. He had considerable difficulties to overcome in the nature of the ground, for between the two salients, the line ran back fully five hundred yards and he had so to dispose of his centre as to enable it to attack simultaneously with the right and left. His dispositions were

as follows:—On the right was the Second Battalion, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel F. H. Nugent, on a one-company front. The attacking company ("C"—Captain Hon. R. Brand) with bombers* attached was drawn up, in front of an old trench astride the Rossignol Ditch—a small watercourse flowing into the ubiquitous Rivière des Laies. On the left were the Lincolns, also on a one-company frontage, in the borrow-pit outside the parapet of Bridoux salient and east of Le Bridoux road. The Royal Berkshires were to attack in the centre, with three companies in line along the cinder track across the re-entrant between the two salients. Behind the Royal Berkshires were to be posted two companies of the Royal Irish Rifles, the remainder of which battalion would hold the line on the left of the assault. In Brigade reserve General Stephens had the 1st/1st Bn. London Regt. and the 1st/8th Bn. Middlesex Regt. He rejected the idea of gas, but arranged for smoke to screen the flanks, and laid two shallow mines which, when exploded, would facilitate the digging of a communication trench to join up with the captured trenches. On the right of the attack the 2nd Bn. East Lancashire Regt. and the 2nd Bn. Sherwood Foresters of the 24th Infantry Brigade were to co-operate with fire.

At 3.30 on September 25th Captain Brand took his company and the special bombers into their assigned position, some two hundred yards from the German line. At 4.25 a.m. the bombardment began. Anticipating the tactics generally adopted later in the war, Captain Brand led his company and bombers right up to the barrage, so that directly it lifted they should leap into the Fort. At 4.30 the barrage lifted. At 4.31 the Corner Fort had been captured, and the bombers were bombing right, left and forward to clear the communicating trenches. "As usual," said a German prisoner bitterly to the Corps Intelligence Officer, "before we knew what was happening the Rifle Brigade was on top of us"! By 6 a.m. "C" Company not only had the Fort but had pushed forward advanced posts into the German second line with blocks established to guard the right flank. Meanwhile "A" Company (Captain C. W. Wolseley-Jenkins) had penetrated into the German front-line trench to the east of the Fort, making use of the Rossignol Ditch for cover. Shortly after 5 a.m. part of "B" Company (Captain Hon. N. G. Bligh) had crossed by the same means; and "D" Company (Captain C. F. Hunt) was already at work deepening the ditch for communication purposes, and carrying material to the forward companies in the captured position. Captain H. L. Riley, the second in command, who crossed with "A" Company took command

* Two parties of forty specially trained bombers, each party under an officer, were posted on either flank of the company.

in the captured trenches, keeping up communication with battalion Headquarters by a telephone laid, and kept in repair throughout the action by the Battalion signallers. The Divisional Commander's report of the action pays a glowing tribute to the "utmost dash and gallantry" displayed by the Battalion and especially by Captain Brand and by Captain C. Wolesey-Jenkins who "particularly distinguished himself." So far on the right the success had exceeded the most sanguine expectations.

On the left the Lincolns had captured Bridoux Fort by the same tactics and had also pushed forward to the second line. But in the centre all was not so well. The Royal Berkshire attack on the left centre broke into the German line, capturing the Lozenge and a strip of trench extending to the elbow known as Fifth Point. But the right company of the Berkshires met with uncut wire masking machine guns; and the attack on Angle Fort was a failure. The consequent exposure of the left flank of the Second Battalion made it wiser to withdraw the advanced posts in the German second line and concentrate upon the defence of Corner Fort with a view to its ultimate absorption into the British front-line system. This was done at 6.30 a.m. At 8 a.m. the situation was that the Lincolns held Bridoux Fort and were in touch with the Royal Berkshires who prolonged the line up to and including the Lozenge. Then came a gap of three hundred yards in which the enemy held out all day. Then came the Second Battalion in possession of Corner Fort and of some two hundred yards of trench to the east of it. Just at about this time the two companies of the Royal Irish Rifles were sent from reserve to strengthen the Lincolns in Bridoux Fort; and the 24th Brigade bombers were sent forward to reinforce the line, "as the main difficulty was keeping up the supply of bombs and bombers." * By 10 a.m. the Second Battalion was strongly entrenched in Corner Fort with blocks to left and right. Sappers had aided the Infantry to reverse the enemy's trench, and communication was established with the old front line. Stores of bombs were accumulated and a machine gun and two trench mortars were brought forward. The Battalion was preparing to make a determined effort to capture the Angle Fort and join up with the Royal Berkshires. But before this could be carried out a series of happenings intervened, best described in the words of Major-General Hudson, the 4th Divisional Commander.

"At 1 p.m.," he says, "a determined counter-attack drove the Lincolns from Bridoux Fort and captured the trench for one hundred yards west of the Fort" (i.e. in the direction of the Royal Berkshires). "Both flanks of the Royal Berkshire were then hard pressed; and at 1.55 p.m. Colonel Hunt gave the order to withdraw.

* Divisional Commander's Report.

"During this time the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade had maintained themselves in the enemy's trenches, had beaten off several counter-attacks and had consolidated their position. . . . Ground had been gained to the east towards the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment and the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade were preparing, by bringing up bombs, to make a big effort to join hands.

"Unfortunately the retirement of the left and centre attacks made it imperative to withdraw the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade; and at 3.30 orders were issued to them to retire."

He records that the retirement was "very orderly," being completed by 4 p.m.; and warmly commends Captain H. L. Riley for the skill and coolness with which it was carried out under his direction. Higher praise could hardly be given to a Battalion by its Divisional Commander in his official narrative of the battle. But it was dearly bought. Captain C. F. Hunt, Captain C. Wolseley-Jenkins, Lieutenants W. N. Monteith, A. W. W. Turnour and W. F. T. Sheridan, 2nd-Lieutenant L. V. Chapman and seventy-three other ranks were killed; Captain Bligh, Lieutenant C. B. A. Hoskyns, the Battalion machine-gun officer, 2nd-Lieutenant C. M. Beazley and one hundred and seventy-four other ranks were wounded. The fighting had been hand to hand and bitter. Lieutenant W. G. K. Boswell, of "B" Company, having shot down two Germans and emptied his revolver, flung himself at a third with bare fists and knocked his man out. Rifleman Fido, only seventeen years of age, won the Military Medal and the Croix de Guerre by his invincible courage throughout the day, bombing indefatigably (and accurately) for twelve hours. He was one of the last to leave the captured trench; and in the very moment of departure he must turn and hurl a final bomb! Sergeant Riddett, of the machine-gun section, who took charge after Lieutenant Hoskyns was wounded, won the D.C.M. by his cool and skilful shooting. D.C.M.'s were also won by Sergeant W. Sheffield, Rifleman J. Ryan and Rifleman Burgess. The first and second for gallantry in patrol, the last for maintaining the telephone line in No-man's-land. Captain Brand received the D.S.O., the Chaplain, the Rev. E. K. Talbot, the Military Cross. Many officers and other ranks were mentioned in despatches.*

<p>The Ninth Battalion at Bellewaarde Farm.</p>	<p>The subsidiary attack on Bellewaarde Farm was a costly fiasco! It is not easy to form a proper judgment of the action because of the "great difficulty in getting reliable information as to what actually happened owing to the fact that only one officer in the whole of the assaulting columns</p>
---	---

* Captain C. W. Wolseley-Jenkins, Lieuts. W. G. K. Boswell, R. C. Gull and W. N. Monteith, R.S.M. Furey, A/Cpl. Shopland and Riflemen McRitchie and Thorpe.

returned unscathed." * But this much is clear. The attack was to be made by the 3rd and 14th Divisions, from right to left; the 14th Divisional front extending from Railway Wood to the Menin Road. The 14th Division attack was confided to 42nd Brigade which decided to attack with the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I., the 5th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks L.I. and the Ninth Battalion Rifle Brigade from right to left. In the case of the Ninth Battalion, the decision to attack does not appear to have been communicated to the companies until 7.30 p.m. on the night preceding the attack; although the Battalion had been rehearsed in attack formation a week before. The plan of the Brigade was to divide each battalion into two columns with definite objectives. During the bombardment which began at 3.50 a.m. the attacking companies left their trenches and dug in close up to the barrage; and at 4.30 a.m. the advance began.

The nature of the country must not be forgotten. The British trenches lay across the lower slopes of the Bellewaarde spur from the railway north of Railway wood, in front of Y Wood, diagonally across the Ecluzette stream to Hooze, excluding the Chateau but including the stables, and thence roughly south through Sanctuary Wood. On the front of the 14th Division, therefore, the British line was commanded from the Bellewaarde spur and an attack upon Bellewaarde Farm involved advancing up a machine-gun-swept glacié. The results of the attack were mixed. The 3rd Division on the right failed to advance; with the result that the right column of the Shropshires also failed to advance. The left column of the Shropshires in spite of machine-gun fire got to its objective; as did the right column of the Oxfordshire and Bucks, destroying three machine guns on the way. But the left column of the Oxfordshire and Bucks was completely wiped out by machine-gun fire, with the result that, although the right column of the Ninth Battalion succeeded in getting forward, there was a gap between the two battalions from which a severe bombing attack on the right flank of the Riflemen was soon afterwards to develop. The left column of the Ninth Battalion went on beyond its objective, sweeping everything before it.

But the attackers were in an extremely difficult position. The left attack found itself on a hillside exposed to shell fire and machine guns from Oskar Farm, a strong German position flanking the Bellewaarde spur beyond the railway to the north. They were at the same time exposed to machine-gun fire from the Bellewaarde spur above them. Before long the Battalion began to suffer severe casualties from these sources; and then the German bombers attacked from the gap on the right. In driving off this attack many more casualties were suffered. "D" Company was

* Report of 42nd Brigade Commander on the action.

brought forward to reinforce the right flank and lost so heavily in the move as to necessitate the absorption of the remainder into "A" and "B" Companies which had made the attack. Between 6 and 6.30 a.m. a strong counter-attack developed from Dead Man's Bottom, the effect of which, combined with the bombing and machine-gun fire from the gap, was to drive in "B" Company. Little by little the rest of the line fell back. Hot fighting took place at the crater on the left where "C" Company maintained themselves as long as their bombs held out. Trench mortars were brought up by the enemy which, in conjunction with machine-gun fire, drove the Riflemen out. By this time, 8 a.m., "A" Company of the 9th Bn. 60th came up to take part in the battle; and a motor machine-gun battery engaged the enemy machine guns and silenced them. Along the remainder of the front the attack had failed, and such troops as could return were back in their old line by 8.30. But on the left the Ninth Battalion fought on for possession of the crater until 4 p.m., when the remnants of two companies ("A" and "C") realizing the hopelessness of longer withstanding the bombardment to which they were subjected fell back to the trenches from which they had advanced. Sergeant H. S. Willey, Rifleman H. Hill and Rifleman C. G. Roberts each obtained the D.C.M. for acts of conspicuous gallantry. The Battalion left Railway Wood that night with four officers and one hundred and forty other ranks only remaining. On October 18th the Commanding Officer (Lieut.-Colonel Villiers-Stuart) was invalided and on the 29th Captain T. P. H. Morris arrived to take command.

The cost to the Regiment of the actions subsidiary to the Battle of Loos was in the neighbourhood of twenty-five officers and seven hundred and fifty other ranks. Each of the three Battalions engaged conspicuously distinguished itself. That the ground gained had to be abandoned was in no case attributable to them. Loos does not figure among the battle honours of the Rifle Brigade because none of the battalions happened to be engaged within the area prescribed by the Battle Honours Committee. Yet the three subsidiary attacks in which the Regiment played so gallant a part are all shown as part of the Battle of Loos. This is one of the anomalies that are perhaps inseparable from a great campaign and at which it would be unsoldierly to cavil. The knowledge of the feats achieved by its battalions on September 25th 1915 is a sufficient honour for the Rifle Brigade.

During the remainder of the year there was little if any change in the location of battalions. The First were at Beaumont Hamel. The Second, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions remained in or behind the Armentières area. Captain G. Gilbey of the Eleventh Battalion won the Military

Winter, 1915.
Location of
Battalions.



CORPORAL A. DRAKE, V.C.

Cross and Sergeant M. Toole and Rifleman A. Holmes won the D.C.M. on October 1st at Red Lamp Salient for rescuing miners who had been overcome by poison gas in a mine gallery. Rifleman G. J. Judkins of the same battalion won the D.C.M. a few days later at Fauquissart. Later in the year Corporal R. Hunt and Riflemen G. J. Higgins and A. S. V. Bond of the Tenth Battalion were awarded the D.C.M. for cutting through the enemy wire in full view of a German sentry. They were out in Norman's-land for over two hours. The Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions stayed at Ypres and the Thirteenth continued in the line at Hannescamps. No further major operation took place before the New Year. There was frequent heavy shelling as when Sergeant Kimberley of the Eighth Battalion won his D.C.M.; and patrol activities continued. In one of these undertaken by the Eighth Battalion another V.C. was gained for the Regiment. Lieutenant Tryon took out a patrol on November 23rd which did not return. Search parties were organized but failed to find it until Lieutenant Backus, Lieutenant and Adjutant R. C. Gorell-Barnes, Corporal Hobday and Rifleman Beazley crawled out and discovered the missing party. The patrol had been surprised when quite close to the enemy's lines. Heavy fire was opened on it, wounding Lieutenant Tryon and one of the patrol. Corporal Drake, the N.C.O., detailed the one unwounded man to carry back the wounded rifleman and himself remained with the officer who was too badly hit to be moved. The enemy fire still continued but Corporal Drake, although hit repeatedly, succeeded in bandaging the wounds of his officer and thus saving his life. When the searchers arrived they found Lieutenant Tryon unconscious but alive, and the Corporal riddled with bullets and dead by the officer's side. For this conspicuous gallantry and self-sacrifice Corporal Drake received a posthumous Victoria Cross. Rifleman Beazley was awarded the D.C.M.

CHAPTER VI

1915-1916

THE SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE ALLIED OFFENSIVE. A SECOND BATTALION RAID.

ON December 6th 1915 there was an Allied War Council at Paris. The principal decision was that the operations of 1916 should take the form of a co-ordinated simultaneous offensive by France, Great Britain, Russia and Italy. This was in reality no more than a ratification in general terms of the policy already discussed and, so far as the Western Front was concerned, settled between General Joffre and Sir John French at Chantilly. On December 19th Sir Douglas Haig succeeded Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force. He was in complete agreement with the policy; and set himself immediately to work out the details with the French Commander.

The proposal of General Joffre was that after a series of preliminary attacks launched in the spring, a great combined assault should be delivered by the French and British simultaneously, that a powerful force of cavalry should be pushed through the gap and behind this screen the Allies should wheel outward (the British north and the French south) and roll up the flanks of the enemy. That is the origin of the Battle of the Somme. It had already been settled that the offensive should form part of a general attack by all the Great Allies. It was correctly anticipated by General Joffre that Russia would not be ready before June. That was the factor that fixed the time chosen for the enterprise.

It was obvious that such an attack must be made at the junction of the two Armies. That, with the other strategic considerations, fixed the place. In its original form it was to be a battle of prodigious magnitude on a front of forty-five miles from Gommecourt to Lassigny. Thirty-nine divisions were to be employed by the French, twenty-five by the British. It was never planned by either Commander-in-Chief as, primarily, a battle for definite geographical objectives. The objective was the German Army. The blow was designated to smash that Army, obliterate its defences, paralyse its mobility, destroy its moral.

The plan was laid almost in the spirit of a prize fight. It was to be a ceaseless raining of blows upon the enemy until he broke. Ground at this stage was of importance only in so far as it facilitated the delivery of the next blow. But as soon as he had been driven from his defences, dazed and shaken with what he had undergone, the fighting would assume a new character. Geographical objectives would become of the highest importance. Swift movements to key positions would become the primary consideration. And so, with a view to the exploitation of victory, in the outward wheel of the two Armies, the British were to be directed to the Bapaume Ridge, the French to the high ground beyond the Somme.

Two preliminaries the French considered of importance: the relief of the French Tenth Army at Arras (where it was still sandwiched between the British First and Third Armies) and the delivery of limited offensives on the British Front to wear down the enemy. General Joffre considered that Sir Douglas Haig ought to strike in April and again in May. In principle the British Commander-in-Chief agreed. Towards the end of January he conferred with General Allenby as to a preliminary attack by the Third Army in the Somme area. He agreed with General Joffre that it should be an attack of fifteen to eighteen divisions, to be increased to twenty-five if the Russians should be attacked in the spring. He assented to another preliminary attack by the British to take place a fortnight before the main offensive, and sent Sir H. S. Rawlinson (who was about to take command of the new Fourth Army) to study the Flanders area with a view to striking in that locality. He promised a course of raids by the British. But the plans were never carried out. On February 21st, with churlish disregard for the intentions of the Allies, the German Crown Prince attacked the French at Verdun and came unpleasantly near to breaking them.*

Modified of necessity by this event and by the immediate release of the French Tenth Army, the Battle of the Somme became an operation entirely different from what had been planned. It was now a counter-offensive; it was upon a smaller scale—a main attack on a ten-mile front, between the Somme and the Ancre Rivers, with subsidiary attacks, each extending about six miles to north and south. The actual date of attack had to be settled on balance between the competing claims of the situation at Verdun and the necessity for the accumulation of munitions and the better training of the troops to be engaged. Sir Douglas Haig would have

* "Verdun had come within reasonable distance of knocking out France for good . . . it marked the culminating point in the fighting spirit of the French Army."—Colonel J. H. Boraston, in *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*.

been prepared to postpone it until the middle of August. General Joffre set the limit of French resistance at the middle of June. And so the date of July 1st 1916 originally agreed upon before Verdun began was adhered to; and the battle was neither brought forward to April, as the French would undoubtedly have preferred, nor postponed to mid-August as the British Commander desired.

Except for Verdun and a certain liveliness in the Ypres Salient, the early months of 1916 were comparatively quiet on the Western Front. There were numerous raids—sufficient to give rise in some quarters to the theory that knobkerries were the weapons that would win the war. The shelling on both sides grew in volume, though the husbanding of ammunition for the coming British offensive left the enemy, for the time, with the last word. In the Salient indeed there was heavy fighting at Hooze, in Sanctuary wood and also at St. Eloi; but the Salient throughout the war exacted its toll of life and limb upon a scale entirely its own. Viewed in comparison with other periods, and especially in relation to what was coming, the British Front was uneventful.

The First Battalion, relieved in the trenches by the 1st Somerset Light Infantry on New Year's Day, began the New Year in billets at Mesnil and Aveluy Wood. Three days later a violent bombardment of Hamel unaccountably began, and a few hours afterwards as unaccountably ceased. The British retaliation drew fire upon the First Battalion billets, with direct hits upon "A" and "I" Companies' Headquarters. The casualties however were few, and none fatal. The Battalion returned to the line that night and continued to alternate in the trenches with the Somerset Light Infantry. "Except for some shelling on the 8th the rest of the month was spent uneventfully." The Second Battalion was training near Aire, until the second week of the month, when it returned to the line at

January, 1916.
Movements
of Battalions.

Fleurbaix, remaining there in and out of the trenches until the end of March. "Beyond the usual sniping and patrol activity no event of importance occurred."

The Third Battalion was just completing its six weeks at Nortleulinghem near St. Omer. On January 7th it returned to Ypres relieving the 7th Bn. Border Regt. of the 17th Division in front of Potijze. Here inattention to trench discipline by a private Rifleman drew shell fire costing two officers and five men in casualties, an illustration of the unsleeping vigilance of the German gunners in the Salient. Elsewhere in the line liberties might often be taken unpunished; at Ypres, never. At the end of the month, after a spell in Divisional Reserve at Ouderdom

huts, which involved the provision of working parties for the remainder of the Brigade, the Battalion went into the line at Hooge, taking over from the 8th Northamptonshire Regt. on January 31st.

The Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions in the 14th (Light) Division continued to hold their trenches in the Saint Jean Sector at Ypres. On the 13th of the month Colonel V. O. Ulrich Thynne, D.S.O., of the Wiltshire Yeomanry, relieved Major C. H. N. Seymour (K.R.R.C.) in command of the Eighth Battalion. The strenuous character of the trench warfare in the Salient at the time may be judged from the casualties of the three Battalions during the month, just under two hundred all told, of which fully twenty-five per cent. were killed. The Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions in the 20th (Light) Division spent part of the month in the Laventie area. Later the Division began to make preparations for a move. The XIV Corps was about to be formed under Lord Cavan. Much impressed by the work of the 20th Division since it arrived in France he asked that it might be included with the Guards Division in the new formation. The 14th (Light) Division then in the Salient was destined for the Somme area where it was doubtless intended for employment in the limited offensive Sir Douglas Haig was then planning with the Third Army Commander. To relieve it in the Northern Divisional Sector was the task of its sister Division, the 20th. By the third week of January the 20th Division was in Second Army area and had been inspected by the Army Commander. Advance parties were sent forward to the units of the 14th Division. Everything was ready for the hand-over by the first week in February. The Thirteenth Battalion was at Bienvillers some ten miles south-east of Arras, a village whose name was very aptly descriptive of the nature of the line there. The Fourth Battalion was at Salonika ; and the Sixteenth Battalion had not yet arrived in France.

February, 1916. February, elsewhere than in the Salient, began as
The quietly as January had passed. The preparations for
Third Battalion the Allied offensive were going quietly forward. But
attacked at Hooge. the Germans were just about to anticipate that offensive
by a thrust of their own. The choice of Verdun is said to have been made
in preference to an attack upon the British as offering an opportunity for
an equally spectacular stroke with considerably less employment of troops.
Ten days before the blow fell, the French Higher Command received
intelligence of its approach. So confident was the Generalissimo of repulsing it, that on the 14th of the month, fully aware of its imminence, he
was again urging Sir Douglas Haig to undertake the preparatory limited

offensive, and fixing the date for the delivery of the great offensive as though nothing untoward could possibly befall. The Regular Battalions of the Regiment remained in their January positions, the Third Battalion meeting and breaking an attack in its Hooze trenches on the 14th, that was evidently a feint to cover the Verdun attack seven days later. This attack was heralded by a severe bombardment throughout the 13th in which all communication between Headquarters and the line was cut off. Only one message was successfully carried over this distance of three-quarters of a mile and that by Riflemen A. Norman and J. J. Caton, who volunteered for the seemingly hopeless task and were awarded Distinguished Conduct Medals for their courage. Moreover they repeated this feat of gallantry on another occasion. It is uncertain whether the attack that developed on the 14th was intended to be pressed home. The enemy exploded a mine under the trenches of the neighbouring 9th Bn. Royal Sussex Regt. and was seen to leave his trenches on the front of the Third Battalion, but the combination of artillery and Lewis-gun fire smashed the attempt on the German parapet. A/Corporal A. C. Butler and Rifleman C. A. Backshall received the D.C.M. for this gallant and skilful piece of Lewis gunnery. None of the enemy reached the trenches of the Battalion, which received the personal congratulations of the Corps and Divisional Commanders and was "mentioned" for its work in Sir Douglas Haig's subsequent despatch.

Similar attacks broke out at the same time elsewhere in the Salient—in particular, two nights earlier, in the familiar locality of International Trench south-east of Boesinghe where the 9th Bn. 60th was in the very act of relief by the Twelfth Battalion. The relief had begun at 9 p.m. and was proceeding, when a violent bombardment began on the left of the line.* Bombing attacks followed, with artillery and trench-mortar bombardments of the communication trenches. On the extreme left the attack was repulsed, but in the neighbourhood of the Lancashire Farm cross-roads the enemy got into the front-line trench and began to bomb along it. Lieutenant S. J. Gribble, the Battalion bombing officer, counter-attacked with his bombers,† and not only recaptured the trench but drove the enemy from one of their own posts and occupied it. Infantry attack was now abandoned by the enemy, who began a steady bombardment with guns and trench mortars that in the next twenty-four hours completely obliterated the trenches on the left and necessitated the

* i.e. in the vicinity of Farm 14.

† Two bombing sections of the 12th Battalion K.R.R.C. borrowed by Colonel Riley were in support.

taking up of a new position in rear. Next followed an intense bombardment on the extreme right of the Battalion line—the cross-roads south-east of Fortin 17. In this locality 2nd-Lieutenant F. J. Fish and a party of thirty men held the trench known as F 30. Shortly afterwards a party of the enemy estimated at two hundred left their trenches, but apparently lost direction, for they delivered their attack upon an unoccupied trench in No-man's-land which they duly captured. A small detachment of this party reached the right sentry group in F 30, but was easily driven off. Two bombing attacks late in the afternoon were also repulsed by rifles and bombs—for the machine gun which was to be the principal defence of their post had jammed with the mud.* Reinforcements sent up by night restored the damaged parapet and barricades. The attack on the Twelfth Battalion was renewed† next morning against 2nd-Lieutenant Fish's party in F 35—the enemy attacking under a heavy trench-mortar barrage. When the trench had been blown into an unrecognizable crater, this officer withdrew his men into shell-holes about thirty yards in rear and beat off the ensuing attack with rifle fire. This party held out for four days without rations. Lieutenant Fish, who was suffering from "trench feet," was carried out on a stretcher. The casualties had been considerable—four officers and one hundred and fifty other ranks. The garrison of one post, F 36, completely disappeared. Incredible as this may appear, it is nevertheless true, such was the state of the line, that in spite of diligent search the trench in question could not be located. At last thirty-eight hours later an officer's patrol, under 2nd-Lieutenant Giffard, stumbled upon a post of five men who said they were the only survivors of the missing garrison. The patrol went on farther to make sure that no others were cut off, and on returning were unable to find the very post they had so recently discovered. At last on the following night the survivors were rediscovered by Captain Musgrave of the 60th and brought in. By an irony of circumstance the garrison in question was composed of a draft that had only reached the Battalion on the previous day and F 36 had been chosen because it was reputed to be the quietest part of the line. It lay in a shallow re-entrant out of sight of the German trenches. According to the survivors the enemy was lying in wait just outside the trench and dashed into it immediately after the relief was complete.

Two nights previously the 59th (Greenjacket) Brigade had taken over the right of the Divisional front (the Turco Farm sector extending from

* Lieut. S. J. Gribble and 2nd-Lieut. F. J. Fish both received the M.C. for their gallantry in these operations.

† It was again renewed a few days later against the 12th K.R.R.C. One post in F 33 was captured with its garrison, which so isolated F 30 that the Divisional Commander decided to abandon it, and the garrison was withdrawn.

the neighbourhood of Krupp Farm to a point just south-east of the Morteldje Estaminet). The trenches, if they could be described as trenches, were in a state of incredible disrepair. The Tenth Battalion narrative describes them as isolated posts, mere sections of trench, that by good fortune had escaped annihilation: in front, in rear and on either side of these sections the ground was literally one mass of shell craters, each forming a pool. The parapet, where it existed, was mostly waist high, never higher, and the ground in front where the theoretical borrow-ditch should have been was a lake of a depth varying from a few inches to several feet. There were no communication trenches in the sector. In marked contrast was the enemy line, which rested upon a series of concrete block-houses built in at intervals along their front. Such a state of affairs was not to be tolerated by General Shute. Sixteen hundred men of the Brigade were working nightly until the front-line system was reclaimed and the communications to the rear were in order. They used an average of four tons of material a night.* On February 18th, in accordance with a Corps re-adjustment, the Greenjackets extended their line to the neighbourhood of Cross Roads Farm, giving up a small sector near Krupp Farm to the left Brigade. Three days later the weather changed for the worse. Snow fell, the canal froze, and before the end of the month there was a thaw, and the trenches, so laboriously built up, became ditches of viscid mud.

Meanwhile the 14th Division on relief by the 20th Division, which was completed during the second week of February, had marched back to the neighbourhood of Cassel for a short spell of reorganization and training. Here the formation of Brigade Machine Gun Companies took place—the first step toward the creation of the Machine Gun Corps. The Eighth Battalion suffered a series of changes of Commanding Officers. Major C. H. N. Seymour (K.R.R.C.) had replaced Lieut.-Colonel Thynne after a few weeks. On February 7th, shortly before the Battalion was relieved, Headquarters was suddenly engaged by enemy field guns, with the result that the Commanding Officer, the Second-in-Command and the Medical Officer were all wounded. The senior company commander took over the Battalion for a few days until the second-in-command, Major A. C. Sheep-

** History of the 20th Division.*

The state of the trenches is shown by the following extract. Left Sector: "The ground between the canal and the German lines was nothing but a quagmire. It was therefore impossible to construct continuous front-line trenches, and those that did exist had in many places been blown in. The isolated sections of trench were separated from each other by gaps which in places were 80 yards or more across with very little wire in front of them. There was only a very small parapet in some places and hardly anywhere any revetment. There were practically no dug-outs, communications were few and bad; they were extremely difficult to drain and were constantly being diminished by shell fire."

shanks, D.S.O., whose wound was slight, returned from hospital on the 16th. On the 26th, Major H. D. Ross, second-in-command of the Seventh Battalion, was appointed to command the Eighth.

On February 29th, after inspection by Sir Douglas Haig earlier in the month, the Division left Cassel for the Somme, detraining at Amiens. But on the 21st the Verdun attack had been delivered and the 14th Division arrived on the Somme only to leave it immediately by march route via Flesselles-Doullens-Sombrin for Arras. By now the battalions in the 20th Division were at close grips with the weather and the enemy at Ypres. On the 21st, Lieut.-Colonel H. C. Petre, who took out the Eleventh Battalion, broke down in health and handed over command to Major J. H. Starkey, his former adjutant. On February 12th the 37th Division extended its line with the 111th Brigade. The Thirteenth Battalion left Bienvillers and moved about four miles north to Bailleulval, where it relieved the French 5th Dragoon Regiment opposite Avinger Wood. The line was quiet enough, though perhaps a little more active than the Hannescamps-Bienvillers trenches which had just been vacated.

On February 21st the Germans struck at Verdun.

February 21st. Verdun and its consequences.	The plans for an offensive on the front of the Third British Army had not progressed and were now abandoned in view of the urgent necessity of releasing the French Tenth Army without delay. The Fourteenth Division was at Arras by the end of February and had already taken over from the French the 41st (Greenjacket) Brigade relieving the 66th French Infantry Brigade (11th and 20th Regiments), which held the sector immediately east of the town. A French Infantry Regiment is composed of three battalions—a French Brigade of two regiments. The Greenjacket Brigade was therefore taking over the line of six battalions with four. In practice this was less of a strain on the troops than might have been supposed, for the French held their front with one battalion of each regiment in line and two in reserve. Moreover the front, to troops seasoned in the Salient, was almost uncannily quiet. The Brigade Commander decided to relieve the battalions of the 11th Infantry Regiment by the two battalions of the 60th and to commit the Ronville sector of the 20th Regiment to the Seventh and Eighth Battalions of the Rifle Brigade. On March 1st the Seventh Battalion took over the line with the Eighth Battalion in support in Arras. The support battalion was within a mile of the front line; but the conditions of the campaign were entirely novel. The companies were completely billeted in habitable houses, with excellent cover from shell fire in the cellars. There were wire-netting beds for the men—a thing unheard of in most rest areas. As for Battalion Headquarters, it was in a house untouched by shell fire,
---	--

taken over, as from a house agent, with furniture, plate, linen, glass—the whole recorded on an inventory and solemnly signed for. The Ninth Battalion in the 42nd Brigade went into a similar piece of line on March 6th; when the 14th Division reorganized the system of holding the trenches and brought in all three Brigades. The trenches, though in some parts they had been neglected and had fallen into disrepair, were a paradise of comfort in comparison with Ypres. There was mud in some of the communication trenches which needed better drainage, but the chalky soil permitted them to be from seven to eight feet deep, and in the Ronville sector they were actually brick-paved. The front-line trench was admirable, well sited, and with excellent machine-gun emplacements. The wire seemed impregnable—it was twenty yards in width! There was accommodation for the whole garrison in shell-proof tunnels and dug-outs; and the cooks could be brought forward to the houses at the base of the communication trenches for the provision of hot meals. It seemed too good to be true; and it was too good to last for long. On March 21st orders were received to block all front-line dug-outs, against which the Higher Command had at that period of the War a deep-rooted prejudice which only experience was to remove.

The First Battalion, meanwhile, which was earmarked with the 4th Division for the great offensive, spent most of February and March training intensively behind the Somme front. On March 20th the 4th Division relieved the 37th Division in the sector, south of Arras, recently taken over from the French—the 11th Brigade taking over from the 112th Brigade in the Fonquevillers-Monchy-au-Bois sector, with the First Battalion in Reserve at Pommier. The Battalion relieved the 1st Bn. Somerset L.I. in the trenches at Hannescamps on the 24th. "From this time until May 2nd passed uneventfully."

On March 30th Major W. V. L. Prescott-Westcar left to take command of the Tenth Battalion. The Second Battalion meanwhile continued quietly in its trenches at Fleurbaix until March 8th, when the 8th Division left the First Army and proceeded by train to Amiens, concentrating in the neighbourhood of Flesselles. During the Fleurbaix tour of trenches Corporal Ryan, who was an excellent sniper, won the D.C.M. for consistent good work. The Third Battalion went back into the line in Sanctuary Wood on March 9th, where it remained until the relief of the 24th Division by the Canadians. On March 21st, relieved by the 2nd Battalion P.P.C.L.I. (commanded by Lieut.-Colonel H. C. Buller, D.S.O., R.B.), the Battalion marched to Godewaersvelde preparatory to going into the trenches of the Canadians in front of the Messines Ridge, where it settled down on the 30th. The three battalions in the 20th Light Division remained in the

northern divisional sector of the Salient. Lieut.-Colonel St. J. D. T. Loftus of the Tenth Battalion was invalided on March the 24th, which created the vacancy filled by Major Prescott-Westcar from the First Battalion. Meanwhile the Thirteenth Battalion, after handing over its trenches at Bailleulval on the relief of the 37th by the 4th Division, went back to Auxile Chateau. Here it attracted the attention of the Third Army Training Staff, and was attached to the Third Army School of Instruction for demonstration, at which it remained throughout April. On March 8th the Sixteenth Battalion arrived at Havre with the 117th Brigade, 39th Division, and proceeded to Sailly-sur-la-Lys, being attached for trench instruction to the 25th Brigade of the 8th Division. "A" and "D" Companies had the good fortune to be attached to the Second Battalion. On the 27th of the month, when the 8th Division was about to move south, the 117th Brigade went via Estaires to Bethune for attachment to the 95th Brigade. From March 28th to 31st the Sixteenth Battalion was in the trenches at Arnequin. Early in April the 39th Division took over its own sector at Givenchy and Festubert in the First Army area.

April was a quiet month for all the Battalions. The First Battalion was at Hannescamps; the Second Battalion went into the line between Thiepval and La-Boiselle north of the Albert-Bapaume road. The Third Battalion remained in the neighbourhood of Messines. The Battalions in the 14th Division continued to revel in the comparative luxury of Arras; and those in the 20th Division after further experiences of the grim Salient were withdrawn from the line (on the relief by the 6th Division) for rest and training. The Twelfth Battalion with the 60th Brigade preceded the remainder of the Division to Calais at the end of the month. The 59th (Greenjacket Brigade), which remained in the neighbourhood of Proven, was inspected on the 28th by Sir Douglas Haig, who congratulated the Brigade on its appearance and steadiness on parade and expressed his high approval of its work in the trenches since its arrival in France. The Thirteenth Battalion having completed its work at Third Army School of Instruction prepared to return to its former trenches at Bailleulval. The Sixteenth Battalion remained in the Givenchy area.

May, 1916.
Preparations
for Battle.

May brought a slight freshening of activity in some parts of the line. The main interest necessarily continued to centre at Verdun where the French with their backs to the wall and the cry "ils ne passeront pas" on their lips were stubbornly and heroically contesting every yard of the ground, but slowly and inexorably were being driven into the inner ring of

forts. The necessity for an intervention on the British front was growing daily more pressing. That it was deferred as long as July brought its consequences in the sadly diminished morale of the French troops in 1917. But the Commander-in-Chief, though by now at the head of a million and a quarter men, was still short of heavy artillery and considered his reserves inadequate. His plans were not matured; and General Joffre with his invincible courage and his Breton stability of mind refused to press Sir Douglas Haig to strike a blow that was not fully prepared.

Preparatory moves for July were already in progress. The First Battalion moved to Halloy when the 4th Division was transferred to VIII Corps—the Corps of Lieut.-General Sir A. G. Hunter-Weston, their old commander in the 11th Brigade at Le Cateau and the Aisne. Here in the Beaumetz area the Battalion settled down to intensive training which lasted until the middle of the following month. The Second Battalion was already on the ground over which the 25th Brigade was to attack and the plans of attack were well advanced; artillery registration and trench-mortar activity woke up the enemy to retaliation, and the hitherto peaceful neighbourhood of Albert began to be what the men called “unhealthy.” Reconnaissances of the enemy line were constantly carried out, 2nd-Lieutenants H. Daniels * and J. W. Murray especially distinguished themselves at this work. Battle practice was steadily pursued out of the line, with particular attention to open-warfare formations of which the majority of the men were ignorant owing to their long concentration upon the radically different problem of trench fighting. The Third Battalion, still at Messines, was quiet enough; but the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions at Arras found the enemy distinctly more active. Early in the month the Greenjacket Brigade was relieved by the 95th Brigade of the 32nd Division and was attached to XVII Corps for working parties, mining and carrying. Whilst so employed the Seventh Battalion became involved in an attack launched by the Germans at 3.30 p.m. on May 21st after a heavy bombardment and a discharge of gas. The attackers succeeded in capturing part of the British line; whereupon a counter-attack was organized in which the Battalion took part; and the support line was recaptured. The other two Battalions were not engaged in active operations, but the sudden rise of the casualties from four or five per month per Battalion to fifty and sixty during May—a certain part of which was spent out of the line—shows the change that was in progress. The enemy in high feather with his successes at Verdun was beginning to test the British front.

The battalions of the 20th Division spent the greater part of the month training. The 59th (Greenjacket) Brigade went to Calais on May 7th. At

* Who won the V.C. at Neuve Chapelle.

midday on the 12th, as it was understood that the Battalion would remain there for several days, officers and men were allowed out on pass after the day's training was over. At 5 p.m. orders were received that the Brigade was to be on the march by 7 p.m. To add to the difficulties it was raining. Officers and men were scattered all over Calais. So excellent was the organization however, that by 7 p.m. the Brigade was on the march and not a man was left behind. They marched till 3 a.m., covering sixteen miles, rested till 11 a.m. and then marched another seventeen miles before 7 p.m. On the 18th Lord Cavan rewarded them with the following message : " The Corps Commander has heard with great pleasure of the soldier-like way in which the 59th Brigade tackled the difficulties of a sudden move on a wet night. It was only to be expected from a Brigade like the 59th, but it reflects credit all the same on all concerned." By the end of the month the Division was in the Ypres trenches once again, relieving the Guards Division in the right sector of the Corps line which extended from Wieltje southwards to the vicinity of Hooze. If anything the enemy activity had increased, for the Division was greeted with an attack during the relief.

The Thirteenth Battalion meanwhile remained at Bailleulval. Activity here had also increased in the form of bombing raids. On the Givenchy-Festubert front of the 39th Division there was also an increase of activity ; the Sixteenth Battalion casualties amounting to forty in the month.

June began with heavy fighting in the Salient. The line was held by the Canadian Corps on the right hand and the XIV Corps on the left. The boundary between the 3rd Canadian Division, the left of the Canadian Corps and the 20th (Light) Division, the right of the XIV Corps, was in the neighbourhood of the Eclusette and some four hundred yards north-west of Hooze. The 20th Division line ran back in front of Y Wood to Wieltje, and the Canadian line included Hooze and ran south past Sanctuary Wood and Hill 62. The attack which was delivered on the morning of June 2nd was directed against the Canadian position from Hooze southwards, though, in fact, it slightly overlapped the boundary and engaged in addition the right battalion of the 60th Brigade. North of the Menin Road it made little if any progress. On the extreme right of the 60th Brigade the enemy was caught by artillery and machine-gun fire and failed with heavy losses. But the attack which developed in the early afternoon upon the Canadian front met with success. Two lines of trenches fell into the enemy's hands, including Sanctuary Wood and Hill 62. Vigorous counter-attacks during the next two days made no important difference to the enemy's gains ; and he was now in a position to launch a formidable attack from Hooze. This developed on the 6th, preceded by a heavy

bombardment at 12.30 p.m. which extended to the front of the 60th Brigade, and lasted till 3.45 p.m. The attack was delivered in two places. A main attack on the Canadians at Hooze, and a subsidiary attack on the 20th Division at the junction of the 59th and 60th Brigades north of the Ypres-Roulers railway. The 60th Brigade line on the front of the attack was held by the Twelfth Battalion which, despite the explosion of a mine that blew in fifty yards of trench at Gully Farm, was manning its parapet in readiness for the assault, and broke it completely with Lewis-gun and rifle fire. In the explosion of the mine Captain W. C. Messenger and thirty men of "A" Company were all completely buried. The reinforcements that were hurried up to hold the crater succeeded in digging out all but two men alive. Machine guns posted on the top of the crater brought heavy enfilade fire to bear on the enemy advancing over the open to attack the Canadians.

On the front of the 11th Bn. 60th, 59th Brigade, the enemy was no more successful, but the main attack succeeded. By eight o'clock that night the Germans had once more captured Hooze. In the organized counter-attack that was delivered on June 13th, the Light Division co-operated by letting off gas* and by raids. The 1st Canadian Division to the south recaptured Mount Sorrel and Observatory Ridge, but Hooze remained in the enemy's possession. The activity aroused by these operations continued through the remainder of the month and most of July as well. The Tenth and Eleventh Battalions though not directly engaged in the German attack were affected like all other units in the Salient by the general increase in activity. On June 10th Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Starkey of the Eleventh Battalion was wounded. He was succeeded in command by Colonel John Harington, D.S.O., of the Fourth Battalion, now recovered from the wounds he received in the Second Battle of Ypres.

Elsewhere on the British front there was the calm before the storm. On the Somme the preliminary bombardment was almost due to begin. The First Battalion, having prepared its own assembly area at Mailly-Maillet, returned for further training to Beaussant. The Third Battalion changed its trenches at the end of the month. The Battalions of the 14th Division passed the month playing cricket matches, finding working parties and doing trench duty at Arras, where they relieved the 5th Division in the line. At the end of the month after the preliminary bombardment had begun on the Somme there was a sudden outburst of activity at Arras with the obvious intention of confusing the enemy as to where the blow was about to fall. The 14th Division made several demonstrations with artillery and trench mortars. The enemy's retaliation was feeble. The Thirteenth

* By some error the smoke bombs were thrown three minutes before zero; the Germans thus had warning and put on their gas masks.

Battalion remained at Bailleulval till the end of the month when it went down to Albert; and the Sixteenth Battalion after a short spell in Divisional reserve at Essars took over the sector at Festubert village.

June 25th.
Second Battalion
Raid.

On June 25th the Second Battalion, having spent part of the month in the line opposite Ovillers-la-Boiselle, was called upon to carry out a raid for which it had been selected and for which Lieut.-Colonel Hon. R. Brand, D.S.O., had made his plans during May. Numerous raids were being carried out all along the Fourth Army front partly to obtain identifications in order to know whether any reinforcement was taking place, partly in order to deceive the enemy as to the extent of the coming attack, and partly in order to observe the effect of the preliminary bombardment. As will be recorded later in this chapter a raid of this description was carried out by the First Battalion thirty-six hours before the battle. That of the Second Battalion, however, was upon a somewhat larger scale and was carried out against a small salient of trench about one hundred yards in length just in advance of the village. It was preceded by a discharge of gas and was conducted by 2nd-Lieutenant J. W. Murray, 2nd-Lieutenant G. H. G. Anderson and fifty N.C.O.'s and men armed with knobkerries, daggers, fixed swords, bombs and revolvers. The party was aligned shortly before midnight along a tape laid by 2nd-Lieutenant Anderson one hundred yards from the enemy's wire. Here they waited during a short bombardment which, when the time to advance arrived, changed to a box-barrage. The raiders had taken out with them three "Bangalore torpedoes" to destroy the German wire, two of which successfully cut satisfactory approaches. The raiders then rushed the trench, killed the garrison either in hand-to-hand fighting in the trench or by bombing the dug-outs into which a few retreated. They had been instructed not to bring back more than three prisoners. They brought back one, of the 180th Württemberg Regiment—but they left a shambles behind them. A hurried investigation with torches, when the fight was over, showed the trench and dug-outs to be choked with dead and wounded—estimated at the least at fifty. The casualties of the raiders, all of which were brought back, were one killed and ten wounded. It was a brilliant little operation of a kind at which the British Army was becoming increasingly expert. Lieutenant Anderson, who led it, was rewarded with the Military Cross.

The raid of the First Battalion was carried out on the night June 29/30th. It was a reconnaissance raid to report on the enemy wire and trenches in order to check the accuracy of the bombardment and to furnish information as to the enemy's method of holding his line. Two parties

went out. Neither succeeded in getting beyond the German wire, which they ominously reported as very thick and uncut. Party B stated that "the special double wire cutter would scarcely cut it." Party A provided a specimen which was sent up for examination, and they reported in addition that the trench-mortar fire was entirely unsatisfactory, as the bombs were falling about sixty yards short of the German line. It was part of the 4th Divisional plan that the attacking battalions should tell off officers whose duty it should be to visit the observation posts of the wire-cutting batteries and report upon the effect of the fire, patrolling in No-man's-land for the purpose. These patrols from other units had reported the wire to be well cut. It will be seen in the account of the battle how far this was correct.

The Somme.
Sir Douglas Haig's
Plan.

It is now time to outline the British plan of campaign. Succeeding chapters will deal with the detailed execution and with the parts played by the Battalions of the Rifle Brigade, all of which at one time or another and some many times, were engaged with distinction to themselves. The origin of the battle and the general policy of the Allies have been told briefly in the foregoing pages. It remains to set out the plan of action as it was finally to be fought.

The modified plan of the Allies was to attack on a front of twenty-three miles from Gommecourt, two miles north of Albert, to the Amiens-Brie road six miles south of the River Somme. The trench line ran from Gommecourt in a general southerly direction past Beaumont-Hamel, Thiepval, Ovillers-la-Boiselle, La Boiselle (on the Albert-Bapaume road) to Fricourt. These villages were in the possession of the enemy; some were on commanding high ground; and all had been fortified into key defensive positions. A few hundred yards south of Fricourt the line began to bear east some four miles to the outskirts of the village of Maricourt (inclusive to the Allies).

At Maricourt it swung away to the south and ran past Curlu (German) on the Somme and thence, rather west of south past Fay, Chilly, And  chy, Lassigny (all inclusive to the enemy) and thence across the Oise to the Aisne. The point of junction of the British and French Armies was Maricourt (inclusive to the French). General Sir Henry Rawlinson, with the Fourth Army to whom the British attack was entrusted, was striking on a front of roughly sixteen miles. General Foch, who was in command of the French, had a front of roughly eight. But the attacks from the Somme to Fay, on the French side, and from Gommecourt to the Ancre on the British were regarded as subsidiary.* The main attack was to be that launched between the Somme and the Ancre. For troops, General Rawlin-

* *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, Vol. I.

son had five Army Corps,* containing in all nineteen Divisions. Of these, thirteen were to attack and six were to be in reserve. General Foch had sixteen Divisions in his army, but was only employing the 20th Corps and the First Colonial Corps, comprising in all five Divisions, to make the assault.

The original conception of the Battle of the Somme had been that of a stupendous drive on a forty-five-mile front in which fully fifty Divisions were to advance together. The French employing thirty-five Divisions and attacking on a front of thirty miles were to give the chief performance. The British were cast for the part of "promising younger brothers." But Verdun had changed all that. The French thirty miles of front was shortened to eight, on six of which the attack was to be purely subsidiary.† The British attack now became the feature of the operation.

The German defences on the ground chosen for the battle were threefold. There was the front-line system. There was the Thiepval-High Wood-Ginchy-Guillemont ridge. And there was the Flers line running from Miraumont-Le Sars-Flers-Lesboeufs through Morval to Sailly-Saillisel. The whole area was closely packed with strong defensive localities such as villages, farms and easily fortified woods, and as far back as the Flers line (which was incomplete) there were well-sited trenches in labyrinthine multiplicity. Behind these defensive lines was the Le Transloy ridge running through Achiet-le-Grand to Bapaume. This was the first objective of the British Army, in so far as a geographical objective existed.‡ It was, in addition, very admirably suited for defensive action by the enemy. The rather grandiose idea of breaking the line, rolling up the flanks of the breach, and sweeping the enemy back to Germany in one magnificent operation had now disappeared. Sir Douglas Haig had never thought there was a royal road to this spectacular kind of victory. He believed that to beat the German Army he must not merely outmanœuvre it, but crush the fighting troops that composed it and destroy the moral of the survivors. He did not believe that out-thinking the Germans was so important as out-fighting them. His objective was the German Army. He declared in his despatch that his object in the battle, besides relieving the pressure on Verdun and preventing the reinforcement of the Russian front, was "to wear down the strength of the forces opposed to us." It was in short to be a trial of stamina. The British Commander believed in his troops.

* From right to left the XIII, XV, III, X, and VIII Corps.

† As things turned out it was on this subsidiary front that the French achieved their most important success.

‡ Professor Dewar and Colonel Boraston both contend that in the proper sense of the words there was no geographical objective to the Battle. The objective was attrition.—*Sir Douglas Haig's Command*.

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME, FIRST PHASE. SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS ELSEWHERE ON THE FRONT.

THE preceding chapter has told of the origin of the Battle of the Somme and the factors that determined the choice of locality and time. Before relating the story of the battle there must be some description of the country over which these operations were to be conducted and the nature of the defences to be attacked.

From Arras, southward, the front line ran between Monchy-au-Bois and Bienvillers and bulged out into a salient east of Hannescamps and Fonquevillers, where, having crossed the Bienvillers ridge, the British trenches in the main followed the one-hundred-and-forty-metre contour; while the German dropped down across the head of the Douchy-les-Ayette valley—at a distance of nearly a thousand yards from the British—and ran up beside the Monchy-au-Bois-Gommecourt road as far as the junction with that leading from La Brayelle Farm to Fonquevillers. Here the German line ran out five hundred yards almost due west along the La Brayelle road, returning at right angles along the western side of a tree-lined fence (past two localities known as the “Z” and the “little Z”), to the confines of Gommecourt Park which, together with the village it enclosed, formed the Gommecourt salient—the key to the whole German system position between Monchy-au-Bois and the Ancre, and the main bastion of the Achiet-le-Grand-Bapaume position. If Gommecourt fell nothing could save Serre; but the taking of Serre was no serious threat to Gommecourt.

The British line conformed to this salient, if anything on slightly higher ground and about a quarter of a mile away. South of Gommecourt the German line dropped slightly across the lower ground leading down to the valley of Puisieux-au-Mont, with the British line conforming along higher ground across the small Hébuterne spur past the Poplars, the Point, John, Luke, Mark and Matthew Copses (which were actually in the British front lines), as far as Redan Ridge. In their five-thousand-yard journey from Gommecourt the two lines had by now come close together, so that from Matthew copse southward they were not separated by more than one hundred

and fifty to two hundred yards. East of the four copses the ground rose gradually to the village of Serre which stands on the summit of a knoll rising unexpectedly on the spur that extends south-east to Grandcourt and Miraumont. To the west of the copses is the high ground of La Signy farm, which overlooks Serre and is backed by the still higher ground of the narrow Colincamps plateau. Redan Ridge, where it was crossed by the front lines, stands at about the same height as Serre. The two points are two thousand yards apart and are separated by a deep valley that runs south-east for a mile and a half (conforming to the southern slopes of the Serre spur) and then opens out to the south and extends to Beaucourt-sur-Ancre along the toes of the Redan spur. The whole of the south-eastern course of this valley is directly commanded from La Signy Farm ; but its southern course is defiladed by the Redan spur and gives good cover for artillery.

From Redan Ridge the front lines ran south side by side at an interval of four hundred yards down the steep slopes of the Beaumont-Hamel valley, up Hawthorn ridge on the other side (the British line considerably above the German) and, bearing roughly south-east, reached the Ancre River at the north-eastern outskirts of Hamel. So far it might be said in general terms that the British held the high ground and that the Germans were below them. The nature of the country is rolling downland divided at intervals by rivers. In the neighbourhood of the rivers the hills sprawl down to the water in a multitude of bold spurs, the ground frequently falling as much as one hundred feet in less than five hundred yards. The German line was between the British and the water ; and naturally enough was commanded by the higher ground behind the British.

Beyond the Ancre the position was exactly reversed. The British line was now between the Germans, on the great Thiepval-Pozières-High Wood-Longueval-Guillemont ridge, and the confluent of the Ancre and the Somme. The British line ran around Thiepval Wood, along the lower slopes of the Thiepval village spur, through the north-eastern corner of Authuille wood, across the Ovillers spur, west of La Boisselle, below Fricourt, below Mametz, below Montauban—dominated everywhere by the towering German defences. It is imperative to point this out because a theory has been built up that the failure of the attack north of Ancre was due to the enemy's preliminary advantage in ground. It is true that the attack in that sector developed so as to give the maximum of advantage to what ground the enemy possessed. But the fact is that to the south, where he had the advantage of ground, the attack succeeded ; and to the north, where the British had the advantage of ground and, in addition, an overwhelming preponderance of numbers, the attack did not succeed.

On the front of the French, north of the Somme, the advantage of ground was decidedly theirs. South of the Somme the ground is considerably less hilly; and the advantage, if any, was with the enemy.

The initial objective of the Fourth British Army was the great plateau sixteen thousand yards in length and anything from five hundred to four thousand yards in width lying north-west and south-east between Combles and the River Ancre, and flanked, on the British side, by the formidable defences of Thiepval, Pozières, the Bazentins, Longueval and Guillemont from north to south. Sir Henry Rawlinson laid his plans in three stages. To protect his left flank he would throw out the VIII Corps facing north-east from Grandcourt around Serre to Hébuterne and simultaneously south of the Ancre he would secure the line Grandcourt-Pozières-Montauban which would place him astride of that portion of the great plateau that lies between Thiepval and Courcellette. That was to be stage one. Next, standing fast from the Ancre to Hébuterne and pivoting on Grandcourt and Montauban he would swing his centre forward to Martinpuich—an advance that would give him all the plateau west of High Wood. Thirdly, standing fast on the line Serre-Grandcourt-Martinpuich he would attack eastwards from Martinpuich and Montauban and secure the remainder of the plateau as far as Ginchy, which would place the whole of the objective in his hands save only the narrow strip jutting out to Morval which could not be attacked until the French had made considerable progress on the right. To realize this plan the capture of Gommecourt was an absolutely indispensable preliminary. If Gommecourt held out the operations against Serre would be attended by the maximum of difficulty and the defensive flank might prove untenable. The operations against Gommecourt were in the hands of General Allenby and the Third Army.

The German defences along the whole of this front were consummately organized to a depth of three thousand yards with further systems in rear. At key points along the line they became something more than rows of trenches—they were genuine field-fortresses. The Gommecourt defences in particular, since they were to exercise so profound an influence upon the whole campaign, are worthy of illustration. These defences stood upon a long spur running out towards Puisieux-au-Mont. Towards the west they commanded no great area. To the north they covered the whole German line almost to Monchy-au-Bois. To the south they covered Serre and the intervening defences. The village of Gommecourt was the keep of the position. From the north it was protected not only by the powerful front-line system, but by the organized area of La Brayelle Farm, Pigeon Wood and Kite Copse linked up with Rettemoy Farm. On the immediate Gomme-

court front it was defended by Gommecourt Wood and Gommecourt Park, both of which were organized for defence as only woods can be. On the south there was the cemetery, always capable of conversion into a strong point, and, beyond that, the defences around Nameless Farm. And flanking the whole position to the south was the Rossignol Wood switch line along the southern face of the spur connecting (via La Louviere Farm) with the main Serre defences to the south, and (via Square Wood) with the Rettemoy-Farm and Pigeon Wood defences to the north. Behind these ran the Puisieux line from Grandcourt north to Le Quesnoy Farm; and behind that line there were the partly prepared Irles-Achiet-le-Petit-Ablainzeville defences connected with the Puisieux trenches by a heavily wired switch line, along the high ground between Achiet-le-Petit and Bucquoy. These were defences that could only be reduced by artillery preparation of the heaviest character. The Gommecourt position, the key to all the others, if it could not be outflanked, was one that could only be taken by a combination of intense artillery fire and masses of highly trained infantry—or tanks of which as yet there were none.

**First and Second
Battalions,
Preparations.**

The only Battalion of the Regiment detailed to take part in the opening attack of the Somme Battle was the First Battalion in the 4th Division. The Second Battalion was in reserve to the 25th Brigade, and the nature of its employment was dependent upon success of the initial operations of the 8th Division. The Thirteenth Battalion had been hurried down by omnibus to the vicinity of Albert and was in readiness for use. None of the remaining Battalions was in the Fourth Army.

The attack of the 4th Division was to be made in the centre of the VIII Corps front, between the 29th Division on the right and the 31st Division on the left. The VIII Corps was on the left of the Fourth Army. Its task was to protect General Rawlinson's flank. Viewed in comparison with what was expected of the main Army south of the Ancre this was not the most formidable part of the operation, but the VIII Corps objective for the first day represented a substantial advance of more than two miles on two-thirds of its front, with a defensive flank facing north-east made by the 31st Division which must capture the field-fortress of Serre to do so. The left of the Corps rested upon the small spinney south-east of Hébuterne known as "John Copse." The defensive flank was to extend from this copse roughly east-south-east to the cross-roads one thousand five hundred yards east of Serre. From this point the Corps objective for the day ran roughly south along Puisieux Trench which followed the Puisieux-Grandcourt road as far as its junction with a country track five hundred yards below

the Beaucourt Road fork and then ran more or less along the track to the Ancre River immediately north of Grandcourt and five hundred yards south-west of Baillescourt Farm.

The Ancre was the Corps boundary, inclusive to the X Corps on the right. Beyond the objective, however, a line of Lewis-gun posts was to be pushed out along the line of the sunken Grandcourt-Puisieux road from Baillescourt Farm north to its junction with Puisieux Trench. Grandcourt was in the objective of the X Corps; and the Green Line, the Fourth Army objective for the first day, ran thence east of Pozières, Contalmaison, Mametz Wood, and Montauban to the neighbourhood of Hardecourt-aux-Bois where touch was gained with the French.

The task of the 4th Division was to reach the Green Line in the centre of the VIII Corps front; and the task was divided into three stages. The first, which envisaged the capture of the German front-line system,* was to be completed within fifteen to twenty minutes of zero, according to the depth of the defences. On the front of the 29th Division this stage included the capture of Beaumont-Hamel. The second stage took the advance forward to Munich Trench, a defensive line in front of the road between Serre and Beaucourt-sur-Ancre. This in the 4th Division sector represented a move forward of one thousand yards on the right and three hundred yards on the left. The right however was, on paper, adequately enough protected, for in this stage the 29th Division was to capture Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, a good thousand yards beyond the 4th Division. On the left, Serre was to fall to the 31st Division in the second stage which, on the 4th and 31st Divisional fronts, was to be over by zero plus forty-five minutes, though on the front of the 29th Division an additional period was allowed. By now, as will be seen from the map, the 4th Division, which was attacking astride of Redan Ridge, would have passed beyond the crest and would be advancing down the Redan spur into the Serre-Beaucourt valley.

This much of the task was allotted to the 11th Brigade reinforced by two battalions of the 48th Division†; and the brigade was directed to attack the first objective with the 1st Bn. East Lancashire Regt., the First Battalion Rifle Brigade and the 6th Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regt. (of the 48th Division) in line from right to left. The two flank units were to detail bombing parties to bomb down trenches as they were gained and find touch with the flank divisions. Strong points were to be constructed at places selected in advance. The second objective (Munich Trench) was to be taken by the 1st Bn. Hampshire Regt., the 1st Bn. Somerset Light Infantry, and the 8th Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regt. (of the

* Four lines of intercommunicating trenches strengthened by a number of redoubts.

† The 48th Division was in VIII Corps Reserve.

48th Division) who, in addition to carrying out similar precautions, were at one and a half hours after zero to despatch a special party to charge and capture any field guns in Artillery Lane, east of the Serre-Beaucourt road, or at the bottom of the valley ; whilst at the same time special patrols went out to cut the wire (of which according to the map there was a considerable amount) between the Serre-Beaucourt and the Puisieux-Beaucourt roads. At this stage the 10th and 12th Brigades were to pass through and form up at the very bottom of the valley along the Puisieux-Beaucourt road, most of which was deeply sunken, completing this movement by two hours and forty minutes after zero, in readiness to attack up the Serre spur and take the third objective, Puisieux Trench, on the Green Line which was to be in their possession at zero plus three hours and a half. The attack was to begin at 7.30 a.m. By 11 a.m. the battle was to be over.

The orders of the 11th Brigade provided that the attacking battalions should have three companies in the front line, each on a frontage of two platoons, and one company in support. Five strong points were to be made by the First Battalion—three in the German fourth-line trench * and two more three hundred yards east of it. These were each to hold a platoon. The First Battalion operation order committed the assault to "I" "A," and "B" Companies from right to left with "C" Company in support. The first wave of the attack was to be two platoons of each company, in line. Then at an interval of one hundred yards would come the second wave, one platoon per company, in line, followed twenty-five yards behind by Lewis-gun sections and squads of bombers. One hundred yards in rear of these would be the third wave, a platoon of each company in line. In rear of "I" (right) Company the Battalion scouts were to follow, together with one of "C" Company's Lewis guns, in readiness to bomb along the captured trenches and find touch with the flank units. Behind "B" Company on the left the Battalion bombers and "C" Company's second Lewis gun were to move for a similar purpose. The front-line companies, in addition to the duty of consolidation, were instructed to engage with fire any machine gun in Munich Trench in order to assist the Somerset Light Infantry. The third wave of each company was made responsible for "clearing up" † the captured trenches when the attacking waves had passed on. Thus the task of the First Battalion would be completed as soon as the front-line system of the enemy had been broken.

The objective of the 25th Brigade was the village of Ovillers-la-Boisselle : the 8th Division was to advance beyond Pozières. The Second Battalion

* The last trench of the front-line system.

† It was later known as "mopping up."

was to come up to the old British front line as soon as the advance began in readiness to act as the situation might demand. All five Army Corps in the Fourth Army, and the 20th French Corps of General Foch's Army group on the right, were to attack simultaneously at zero—eventually fixed at 7.30 a.m. on July 1st. Simultaneously the Third British Army was to make an attack on the Gommecourt salient, using the 49th Division for the purpose. There were eleven British and five French divisions in line with seventeen in reserve. Facing them were seven German divisions—six opposite the British; one only opposite the French. Such were the plans of campaign. Before the operations had been in progress twenty-four hours they had been substantially modified; and in many respects radically changed. Bearing in mind Sir Douglas Haig's general intentions, it is necessary, now, to consider the battle from the point of view of what actually happened.

The results of the Somme offensive make it convenient to group these operations into four periods—each composed of two or more stages. The first period begins with the grand attack of July 1st and comprises two stages; the operations up to July 12th which culminated in the capture of Mametz Wood; and the general attack of July 14th upon the uncaptured parts of the main objective of July 1st on the new front of the Fourth Army. This period ends with the collapse of the heavy German counter-attack of July 18th and the retention of nearly all the British gains. The first step of the second period begins on July 23rd with the combined attack of the Fourth and Reserve Armies from Pozières to Guillemont—unsuccessful on the right but culminating on the 24th in the capture of Pozières by the Australians. The second stage of this period stretches from that date until the end of August and consists in a series of less extensive operations undertaken by the various corps to secure jumping-off places for the next big attack, the chief feature of this stage being the fruitless struggle of the XIII Corps to capture Guillemont—"the strongest centre of resistance on the British front." The third period begins on September 3rd with the Battle of Guillemont ending seven days later with the final capture of Ginchy (stage one) and continues, stage two, with the French advance to Bouchavesnes (Sept. 12th) and the great battle of Flers-Courcelette. Stage one of the fourth period is the general advance of September 25th when Combles fell, the French pushed on to Frégicourt and Rancourt, the Fourth Army took Gueudecourt, Lesbœufs and Morval, and the Reserve Army captured Thiepval. The second stage of this battle is the attack of October 7th, when the French made a second effort to reach Sailly-Saillisel, and the Fourth Army advanced to the ridge overlooking Le Transloy and took Le Sars. The third stage includes the

attacks of October 12th and 18th in support of the French who captured Sailly-Saillisel. The fourth, and so far as the fighting on the Somme is concerned, the final stage is the abortive attack toward Le Transloy on October 23rd. In relation to the whole original front of attack however, the final phases of the operations are the two battles of the Ancre of November 1916 and of the early months of 1917.

July 1st.
The Attack of
the
First Battalion.

The hour of zero came, heralded by an increased fury in the bombardment; the guns lifted to their next targets; and sixteen miles of British troops left their trenches and engaged the enemy. Along the greater part of that extended front machine guns magically appeared upon parapets surprisingly undamaged and shattered the British attack, already held up in many places by uncut wire. On the front of the French no attack had been expected by the enemy; and his defences were overrun. South of the Somme the Germans were completely demoralized: the French swept on nearly to Peronne in the first few days. Immediately north of the Somme the French, attacking over country very similar to that at Redan Ridge, progressed to Curlu and across the Maricourt spur to the neighbourhood of Favière Wood. Immediately north of them the British XIII Corps scrambled up the Carnoy valley and took Montauban and the Briqueterie—a fine achievement. On their left the XV Corps took Mametz and invested Fricourt. From there the tale of disaster began. On the III Corps front the 8th Division progressed a certain distance up Mash valley between Ovillers and La-Boisselle. The X Corps could make no headway against the Thiepval defences. North of the Ancre the VIII Corps attack, though it pierced the enemy's line at many points and though isolated bodies of troops penetrated considerable distances, was beaten back and ended where it had begun. And the subsidiary attack upon the Gommecourt salient was crowned with failure complete and unredeemed by aught save the desperate bravery of the troops engaged. The artillery preparation upon that impregnable fortress had been inadequate and ill observed. The wire was uncut and the forward trenches undamaged.

The 4th Division attack was in the hands of the 1st Bn. East Lancashire Regt., the First Battalion Rifle Brigade and the 6th Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regt. These three battalions moved from their assembly trenches at 7.26 a.m., 7.29 a.m. and 7.30 a.m. respectively—the variation in timing being due to the distance to be covered in each case. The East Lancashire at once came under heavy machine-gun fire from Ridge Redoubt and also, according to the Divisional narrative, from Beaumont-Hamel, though the nature of the ground makes that a little difficult to understand.

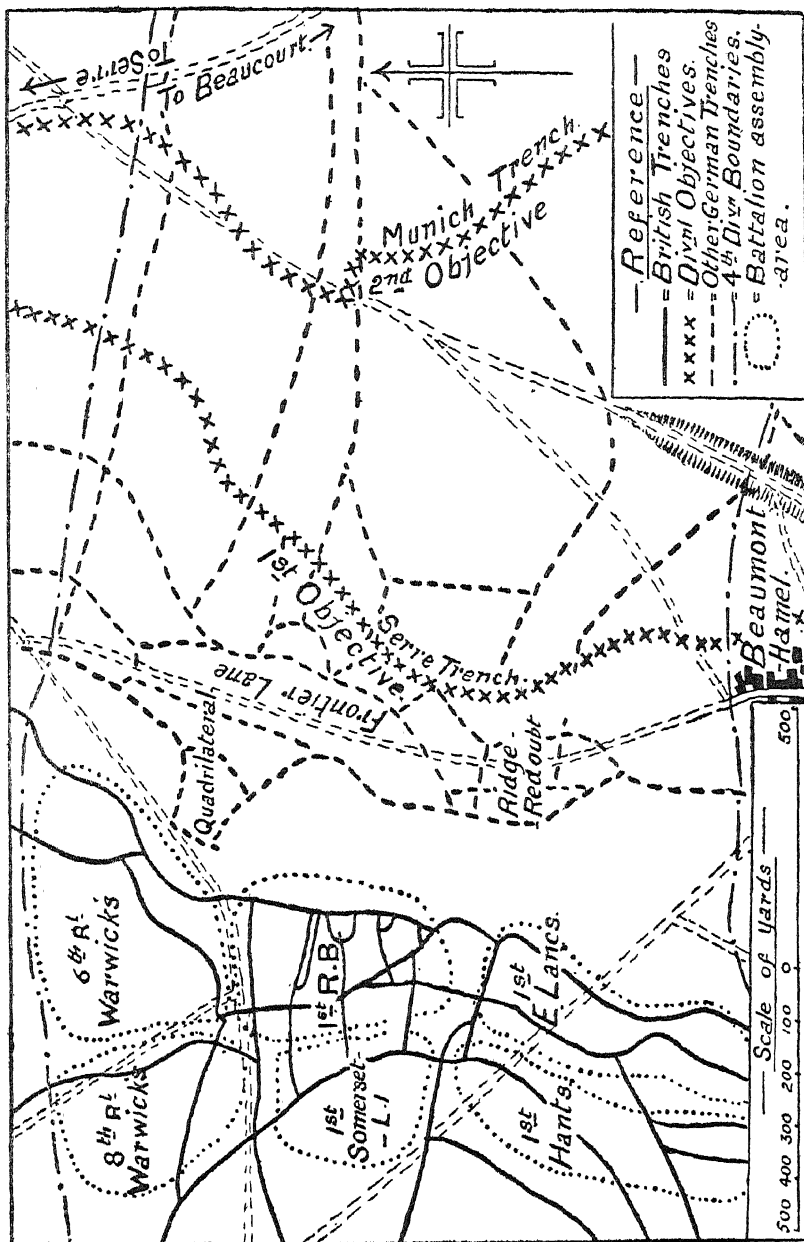
But the governing factor on this front was the enemy wire which was uncut. Details of three platoons of the left company succeeded somehow in scrambling through and reached the German front line. Elsewhere that battalion made no progress. Behind the East Lancashire, the 1st Bn. Hampshire Regt. came up in support and encountering the same machine-gun fire took shelter in shell holes. On the left by 7.40 a.m. the attack had failed. The right company of the Royal Warwickshire got into the enemy's trenches simultaneously with the left company of the First Battalion. The left company of the Royal Warwickshire was annihilated by machine-gun fire from Serre and could achieve nothing.

The attack of the First Battalion on the front of the right and centre companies ("I" and "A") was held up immediately on leaving the trenches. Murderous machine-gun and rifle fire broke out from the German line, especially from Ridge Redoubt and the Quadrilateral,* reinforced by heavy fire from Serre. The men struggled on, falling right and left, until the survivors reached the enemy wire—only to find it uncut. Working along it the third wave of the right ("I") company succeeded in entering the German front line; but, unable to find touch on either flank, could not maintain their position. On the left ("B") company front things were better. The first wave dashed into the trenches and engaged the garrison in a bombing fight, driving them steadily back. Meanwhile the second and third waves, "C" Company and part of "A" Company, which had worked their way up to the gap in the wire, together with a party of Somerset Light Infantry who were behind the First Battalion, arrived in the captured trench and began bombing forward to the second line along Frontier Lane—a country track seventy yards or so behind the front-line trenches. But the artillery barrage, behind which the troops should have been moving over the open, had long since been lost. The great open-order advance had become yet another of the innumerable trench *mêlées* in which the knob-kerry and the bomb had ousted the rifle and bayonet. Despite the months devoted to training, the troops had not been taught, or had failed to learn, the difference between a battle and a raid; and the British Army paid dearly on July 1st for the want of that knowledge. The third wave which had been told off for mopping-up had only the haziest idea of what mopping-up involved; and in the confusion and compression of the entry into the enemy line became mixed up with the second wave and moved forward with the latter leaving the German dug-outs to chance. Had the artillery preparation destroyed the German wire,† and had it effectively engaged the

* A rectangle of enemy trench projecting out towards the British line on the north slopes of the Ridge. See Sketch Map opposite.

† It will be remembered that the First Battalion reported on the 30th June that the wire on its front was uncut.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.
1st July, 1916.



THE FIRST BATTALION ATTACK ON THE REDAN RIDGE.

enemy front line, the initial infantry advance would no doubt have swept over the first-line defences according to time-table ; and the moppers-up, unhampered by confusion, might then have done their entirely new work. But the artillery fire had been ill directed ; and there was no surprise—for the enemy was waiting for the attack north of the Albert-Bapaume road. The badly cut wire and the hail of bullets were sufficient to disorganize any attack. And the troops who made it cannot be blamed in their disconcertedness and surprise for reverting to the only form of warfare with which they were thoroughly familiar—trench to trench bombing attacks.

A party of Riflemen from this mixed force of the First Battalion and the Somersets bombed their way through eventually to the First Battalion objective—the rear trenches of the front-line system. Here they were reinforced by men from the other units and a composite force maintained its position with bombing blocks on either flank and Lewis guns covering the front, until late in the afternoon. The situation at 10 a.m. was that the first objective on part of the Divisional front was held by detachments of the First Battalion, the Somersets and the Royal Warwickshires, with other detachments of the same units in support. Meanwhile at 9 a.m. the 10th and 12th Brigades had advanced. On the right the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers could make no progress ; and the 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders somehow found their way into the trenches held by the First Battalion. On the left the 2nd Bn. Essex Regt. and 1st Bn. King's Own Regt. joined the Royal Warwickshire and small parties pushed on towards Munich Trench. By noon the bomb supply was running low and the heavy fire made it impossible to send up further supplies. The little force on the first objective began to feel the pressure severely. As the day wore on the Germans began to close in. No bombs could be found to hold off the counter-attacks, which began to develop along the trenches right and left and along a communication trench to the front. Gradually the British were driven back the way they had come. An attempt was made to hold out in the German second line ; but the German supply of bombs was apparently inexhaustible, and after fifteen minutes, this was found to be impossible. The 29th and 31st Divisions on the right and left had both failed. By 5 p.m. all that could be retained was the trench across the base of the Quadrilateral. Blocks were made, some consolidation was attempted and the Riflemen and their reinforcements held out against repeated bombing attacks and despite heavy shelling, until relieved by the 1st Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers on the following morning. It had been a day of terrible disaster to the Battalion and to the whole 4th Division. The Battalion had lost twenty officers (including Major D. Wood, killed, in com-

mand) and four hundred and fifty-four men.* The Division had lost three hundred and three officers and six thousand five hundred and eighty-seven men ! It cannot be pretended that the casualties of the enemy were in any way commensurate. Next day the Battalion was taken out of the line to refit and reorganize. It was not employed again in the Somme battle until late in the fourth period. Before the end of the month the 4th Division had left for Ypres to relieve the Guards Division.

Operations South
of The Ancre.

The plans and objectives of the 8th Division on July 1st have no more than an academic interest for Riflemen ; for the plans were unrealized, the objectives were not reached and the Second Battalion had no part in their attempted execution and capture. The 25th Brigade had attacked with the 2nd Bn. Royal Berkshire Regt. and the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. in front, the 1st Bn. Royal Irish Rifles in support and the Rifle Brigade in reserve. The attack suffered the same unhappy fate as that of the 4th Division. It was met and smashed by shell and bullets. The Second Battalion moved up from the reserve assembly position by communication trench to the British front line where it swelled the heavy congestion caused by the failure of the attack ; and, coming under violent shell fire, sustained one hundred and thirty-three casualties (including five officers). Further operations having been abandoned, three companies were withdrawn to the support line, the front being held by " D " Company and the shattered remnants of the other units of the Brigade. At dusk " A " Company relieved the survivors of the attack ; and on the following night the troops of the 8th Division left the Somme for the Bethune area. Like the 4th Division, the 8th was for the time smashed out of recognition.

Sir Douglas Haig now decided to turn his whole attention to the front on which there had been success. He transferred the VIII and X Corps on July 2nd to a Reserve Army under General Gough which was to co-operate on Sir Henry Rawlinson's left, and settled down to enlarge the gap that had been made between Fricourt and Montauban. Operations were at once undertaken to gain Ovillers, Contalmaison, Mametz Wood, and Trônes Wood, and to push on to Maltz Horn Farm above Hardecourt where the French were attacking. On July 7th the XV and III Corps the Fourth Army and the X Corps of the Reserve Army attacked from Ovillers to Mametz ; next day the XIII Corps attacked Trônes Wood simultaneously with the French attack on Hardecourt. Once again the right attacks were

* First Battalion Casualties. Officers : Killed, 7. Wounded, 7. Missing, 1. Wounded and Missing, 2. Other Ranks : Killed, 52. Wounded, 239. Missing, 163. Missing, believed Killed, 3.

successful ; but the left and centre encountered a series of reverses. Mametz Wood was the grave of the 38th Division which spent itself in repeated attacks before gaining and holding a footing. Contalmaison was repeatedly captured and lost. And Ovillers and La-Boisselle continued to defy capture.

In the fighting at Ovillers the Thirteenth Battalion (Lieut.-Col. C. F. Pretor-Pinney) was heavily engaged. The losses sustained by the 34th Division on the right of the III Corps front in the attempted capture of La-Boisselle had been such that it was thought best to reinforce the Division with two fresh brigades, and the 111th and 112th of the 37th Division were chosen.

By the time they arrived in the neighbourhood of Albert the 19th Division had captured La-Boisselle, but was so short of men as to make reinforcement essential. The 13th Bn. Royal Fusiliers and the Thirteenth Battalion on arriving at Bresle were, on July 6th, hurried off at 5 p.m. to join the 56th Brigade, then holding the newly won line. The Thirteenth Battalion was for the time put into Brigade Reserve in the Tara-Usna line across the high ground in front of Albert. On the night 9/10 of July the 111th Brigade relieved the 56th Brigade in trenches due east of La-Boisselle and about one thousand three hundred yards from the village, when the 34th Division (Maj.-Gen. E. C. Ingouville-Williams, C.B., D.S.O.) once again took over from the 19th. The Thirteenth Battalion relieved the North Staffordshire in the front line. On July 10th the 23rd Division made its third successful attack on Contalmaison, and at the same time the 34th Division attacked the Ovillers-Contalmaison line. The Thirteenth Battalion was in support to the initial attack but, in the late evening, received orders to move up and renew the attack at 8.45 p.m., in conjunction with attacks by other units on either flank. Colonel Pretor-Pinney deployed his battalion in two lines—"A" and "B" Companies leading, "C" and "D" Companies following in support—choosing this method as the best in the circumstances since "C" and "D" were already in the support trenches, and therefore "A" and "B" could start as soon as "C" and "D" reached the front line—for no time could be lost. Although raked by machine guns from Ovillers, still in the enemy's hands, the Riflemen upheld the best regimental traditions—penetrating three lines of enemy trenches, capturing two hundred prisoners and inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Colonel Pretor-Pinney, despite a severe wound, remained with his men until ordered back by the Brigadier. Inexplicably enough, after the attack had been launched, a runner caught up the rear companies with a message that the operation was cancelled.* But the Battalion was

* "At about 7.30 p.m.," says the 111th Brigade Diary, "orders were received by the 13/R.B. to attack trenches immediately to their front. A simultaneous attack was to be made on our right and left. . . . Unfortunately this attack was cancelled, but too late to stop R.B. The attack on the flank was not launched."

committed and could only break off the engagement as soon as the order reached the men. It returned to its starting-place, having lost twenty officers, including the commanding-officer, adjutant, and all the company commanders, and three hundred men.

On the 12th Mametz Wood was finally captured ; and the first stage of the first period of the battle came to an end. On July 14th the second stage began—a modification of the second stage of the original Fourth Army plan by which, it will be remembered, General Rawlinson was to pivot on Grandcourt and Montauban and swing his centre forward to Martinpuich. Between Martinpuich and Montauban he came within an ace of succeeding—for the XV Corps broke through actually as far as High Wood, where the 7th Division held out for twenty-four hours before being withdrawn to the line of the Longueval-Bazentin road. On the right this attack secured Trônes Wood and Longueval, whence the line captured ran around the two Bazentins to Contalmaison-La-Boisselle. This attack, in which no battalions of the Regiment were employed, was followed on July 18th by a heavy German counter-attack at the point of the Longueval salient, which recaptured part of Delville Wood and penetrated into the orchards on the north side of the village.

The first period of the Somme Battle was over. The German reserves had arrived to the extent of eight new divisions ; and more were being hurried to the spot. " The attempt to force a gap through the German defence line by a series of powerful attacks pressed forward rapidly, before the enemy could bring reserves to the threatened front in sufficient strength to bar our progress, had definitely failed though it had not failed by much."* But the Battle of Verdun had ceased to give anxiety—the pressure there had been effectively relieved. And having committed himself to battle on the Somme Sir Douglas Haig decided to go on.

On July 23rd the battle was resumed along the whole line from Pozières to Trônes Wood. Pozières was taken by the Reserve Army on the following day—an important gain of high ground. But on the remainder of the front the attack was a failure. The decision was then taken by the Commander-in-Chief to push on with the piecemeal attacks—making ground yard by yard, wherever it could be gained, in order to take the British troops well on to the high ground for their next big attack. Though adopted with the view of economizing men and munitions it proved an expensive policy. The Corps were given their objectives and conducted independent operations to secure them. The XIII Corps was to gain Guillemont and Delville Wood ; the XV Corps, the high ground between

* *Sir Douglas Haig's Command.*

Delville Wood and High Wood ; the III Corps, the ridge High Wood—Pozières ; whilst the Reserve Army was to push up the ridge towards Courceleste. A reference to the map will show that these would have been normal objectives for a general advance. By the change of plan they were distributed to the corps to be battled for piecemeal. It says volumes for the dash and stamina of the troops that considerable progress was made. At the beginning of these operations there were no battalions of the Regiment on the Somme ; but before long five of them were taking part.

In conformity with the new policy the XIII Corps attacked independently from July 27th—29th, making a little progress into Delville Wood and the orchards north of Longueval ; and on the 30th attacked Guillemont and Falfemont Farm in conjunction with a French attack on Maurepas. Both attacks failed. Guillemont was entered but the enemy retook it. Early in August the Reserve Army pushed beyond Pozières up the high ground and the III Corps took forward the line between Pozières and High Wood. The XV Corps was working forward to the line of Wood Lane (the Delville Wood—High Wood road). On August 8th the XIII Corps again attacked Guillemont and once more failed with heavy losses.

Piecemeal Attacks.

The
Third Battalion
at Guillemont.

On August 7th the 14th Division with the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battalions, after a week's training near Doullens, arrived in the Somme area, detraining at Mericourt L'Abbé and marching to the billets in the neighbouring villages beside the Ancre. The 24th Division with the Third Battalion had arrived a few days earlier and was already in Sir Walter Congreve's * XIII Corps. On the 12th August the 17th Brigade, with the Third Battalion, went into the line opposite Guillemont and on the previous day the 41st (Greenjacket) Brigade went into the line in Delville Wood. The two Battalions of the Regiment were in reserve. Meanwhile the Corps had been hammering away without much effect upon their various objectives, and the French to the south had gained a footing in Maurepas. On the 14th the Eighth Battalion and the 8th Bn. 60th of the 41st Brigade went into the line north of Longueval to prepare jumping-off trenches for the Seventh Battalion and the 7th Bn. 60th who were to carry out the attack on the 18th, in conjunction with the 33rd Division. The 17th Brigade of the 24th Division was taken back to Carnoy to prepare to attack Guillemont on the same date.

The attack of August 18th, though limited in objective, extended along the front of both the XIII and XV Corps from the junction with the French, south of Guillemont to the vicinity of High Wood ; but the operations were independent and began at different times. The objectives were Guillemont, Delville Wood and High Wood. The 24th Division attacked with three

* Lieut-General Sir Walter Congreve, V.C., a former officer of the Regiment.

brigades in line, 72nd, 73rd and 17th from the right. The right brigade was to attack from Arrow Head Copse strong point and protect the right of the centre brigade. The 73rd Brigade was to pass through the middle of Guillemont and advance in three bounds to the eastern edge. And the 17th Brigade with the Third Battalion on the right, the 8th Bn. The Buffs on the left, and the 1st Bn. Royal Fusiliers and the 12th Bn. Royal Fusiliers in respective support, was to push through the northern outskirts of Guillemont to "ZZ" Trench. The Third Battalion's task, attacking from Mike Trench and New Trench, was successively to capture the German front line, High Holborn—the Guillemont—Longueval, road and "ZZ" Trench in touch with the 73rd Brigade. The Buffs attacking from a sugar refinery on the Longueval road * had only one objective—the prolongation of "ZZ" Trench; for, on their front, repeated attacks of the past month had eaten into the enemy's front and support system.

The 14th Division was attacking on the left of the 24th from Delville Wood to the slopes north of Longueval. The attack of the 41st (Green-jacket) Brigade was upon the defences known as Orchard Trench and Wood Lane which the 7th Bn. 60th and the Seventh Battalion were to attack together. Beyond, on the left, the 33rd Division was to capture the remainder of Wood Lane and High Wood with it. A bombardment begun on the 17th thickened on the 18th until at zero, 2.45 p.m., on the front of the 14th Division, it became intense and the infantry crept up under it in readiness to assault at 2.50 p.m. The 60th on the right of the 41st Brigade overran Orchard Trench on their front and dug in two hundreds yards beyond. The right company ("A") of the Seventh Battalion also captured its section of Orchard Trench, but the task of "D" Company on the left was far more difficult. From a jumping-off trench indifferently sited and in rear of those on the right, "D" Company (Captain E. W. Pope) had to secure two hundred yards of Wood Lane that ran forward at an angle from Orchard Trench. Success was necessarily dependent upon support on the left where the 33rd Division was advancing. But the 33rd Division was held up at the very outset. "D" Company in the ensuing delay lost the barrage; and though the southern end of Wood Lane was captured and retained, the remainder held out. A block was built thirty yards up the road and there and in Orchard Trench the Seventh Battalion, reinforced now by "B" Company (Captain Prior) of the Eighth Battalion, remained until midnight of the 19/20th August when it was relieved and went back to Montauban. The casualties for so small an operation had been heavy: six officers and two hundred and sixty-four other ranks—of whom Captain Pope and sixty-two other ranks were killed.

* Known at that time as Waterlot Farm.

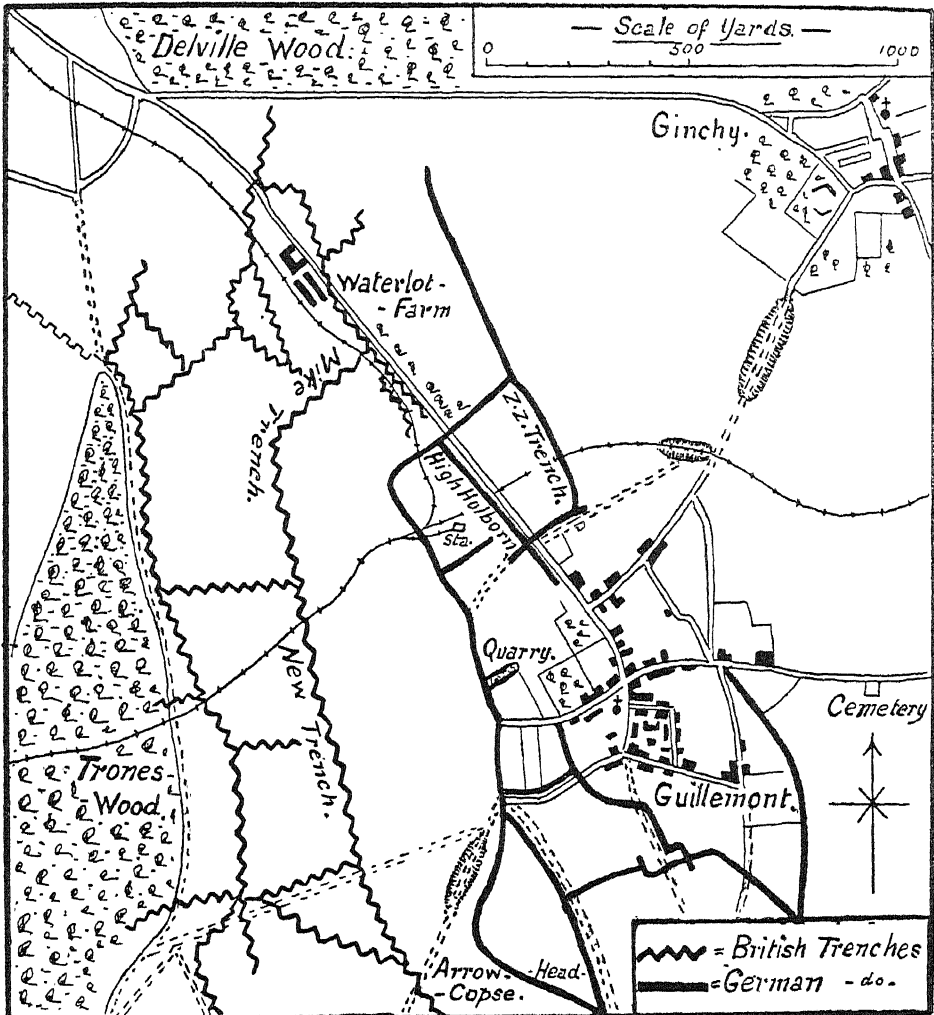
The attack of the Third Battalion at Guillemont took place at half-past four on the same afternoon. At 4.25 p.m. the intense barrage began and then "A," "B" and "D" Companies in that order from the left under Captains D. N. Guthrie, the Hon. M. T. Boscawen and J. H. Smith respectively, advanced up to the barrage. Keeping close under the barrage the companies crossed "No man's land" without much loss: but the enemy's garrison was determined and courageous and there was a fierce hand-to-hand fight before the first objective was captured with two officers and a hundred unwounded prisoners and as many again killed and wounded. The prisoners were utilized to reverse their own trench and consolidate it into the British line. Meanwhile the Buffs had reached their objective; but the 73rd Brigade on the right had been unable to advance. At half-past six the Third Battalion were due to advance on their second objective—High Holborn. The failure on the right, however, necessitated some modification of the plan; and accordingly "D" Company was directed to form a flank facing the village whilst "A" and "B" Companies went on to High Holborn. This proved entirely successful, Guillemont Station falling to the advancing companies who reached High Holborn and dug in. The further advance to "ZZ" Trench on the Third Battalion's front was considered inadvisable in view of the situation on the right. No attempt was made to advance further. The casualties in comparison with the results were not heavy and the proportion of men killed was unusually light. Five officers and twenty other ranks were killed (the proportion of officers was unexpectedly high). Six officers and one hundred and eighty-seven other ranks were wounded; and seven men were missing.

But Guillemont was still in the enemy's possession; and Guillemont the Commander-in-Chief was determined to capture. On the left of the Fourth Army front he was by now looking down upon Martinpuich and on the front of the Reserve Army he was beginning to threaten Thiepval from behind. By changing his plans and striking north he might have obtained startling results; but that would have involved a departure from the joint enterprise, and a cessation of French activity. Guillemont was therefore the key position. The French were daily enlarging their hold upon Maurepas; and Guillemont and Falfemont Farm in the enemy's line made progress by the French difficult and slow. The 24th Division was directed to repeat its attack upon Guillemont, using the 72nd Brigade in place of the 73rd. The Third Battalion plus one company of the 1st Bn. Royal Fusiliers was to secure the remainder of High Holborn and push on to "ZZ" Trench, the objective of August 18th, whilst the 72nd Brigade carried out the rôle of the 73rd. The date fixed was August 21st.

Once again 4.30 p.m. was zero hour. Once again the brigade in front

GUILLEMONT STATION.

18th August, 1916.



THE CAPTURE OF GUILLEMONT STATION BY THE THIRD BATTALION.

of Guillemont withered away before the fire from that seemingly invulnerable fortress. "D" Company of the Third Battalion (Lieut. L. G. Butler) and "A" Company 1st Bn. Royal Fusiliers (Captain Bell) attacked side by side—the Royal Fusiliers on the right. "D" Company struggled to High Holborn at the cost of all the officers and three-fourths of the men. Sergeant Veneer with the twenty-three survivors hung on in an untenable position on the objective until ordered to withdraw after dark. The Royal Fusiliers, held up by the failure on the right, could make no progress beyond High Holborn, for they were taken in rear by the enemy's position in the quarry west of the village. Sergeant Veneer, one of the best shots in the Third Battalion, was given targets for his rifle that are not to be found at Bisley. At less than a hundred yards' range he fired one hundred and fifty rounds at Germans in the orchards near the village. The Royal Fusiliers were shooting at closer ranges. The artillery too was making excellent practice. But the village of Guillemont was held in great force with strong supports in tunnel dug-outs. No sooner were the front-line troops shot down than they were replaced from the supports. In the thick of this engagement Lieutenant Butler was hit—and found himself paralysed. Two of his men were eager to carry him in but he forbade them to run the risk of approaching him. Despite the severity of his wound he destroyed his maps and papers and shouted encouragements to his men, urging them to hold out at all costs. A second time the same men went to him. Although by then he was dying, he refused to be touched and ordered them back. At the end of the day when at dusk the company was called in, they went out for him a third time. But by now he could not be found. . . .

Thus the attacks of August 21st were not notably successful. Next day the 24th Division was relieved by the 20th (Light) Division. The 14th Division continued its operations against Delville Wood—the Ninth Battalion assisting in the advance of the 9th Bn. 60th with bombers, Lewis guns and carrying parties and relieving that unit on the completion of its task. The 14th Division was then relieved by the 24th Division and went back to the neighbourhood of Amiens to prepare for its part in the third phase of the Somme Battle. Lieut.-Colonel Heriot-Maitland of the Seventh Battalion was promoted to command the 98th Infantry Brigade in the 33rd Division; and Lieut.-Colonel H. D. Ross relinquished the command of the Eighth Battalion to Captain (T/Lieut.-Colonel) W. R. Stewart, Brigade-Major of the 41st Brigade. Meanwhile on the night of August 31st the 24th Division lost Orchard and Tea Trenches, the whole fruit of the 14th Division's fighting; and on September 1st the Third Battalion was given the task of retaking them. The ground was entirely

unfamiliar to the Battalion which was in reserve at Montauban and had not yet reconnoitred the new line. Finding no communication trenches the three assaulting companies, "A" "B" and "D," marched over the top to their jumping-off trenches without a shot being fired at them. But they were not in position till 6 p.m., and 6 p.m. was zero. The barrage came down. The companies, "A" (2nd Lieut. N. C. Denton) on the left, "B" (Captain Hon. M. T. Boscawen) in the centre, and "D" (Lieut. R. Edwardes), on the right, left their trenches and attacked. They were heavily fired upon, losing more than fifty per cent. of their effectives in the attack on Orchard Trench, which they captured. Lieutenant R. E. Vernede now brought up "C" Company in support; but it was clear that the further attack on Tea Trench was impossible. There had been no opportunity of making any adequate preparations or undertaking any reconnaissance. Orchard Trench was lightly held by the enemy, but Tea trench was held in force; the attacking companies were hardly stronger than platoons and the barrage had passed on. The casualties sustained in so much of the operation as was attempted were five officers and two hundred and six men. The total casualties on the Somme were eight officers and sixty-seven other ranks killed; twelve officers and three hundred and eighty-two other ranks wounded; twenty-three other ranks missing. On September 6th the 24th Division left the Somme to join Sir Henry Wilson's IV Corps at Vimy Ridge, and did not return.

Preparations
for the Battle
of Guillemont.

Meanwhile the 20th (Light) Division, as we have seen, had made its appearance on the Somme, relieving the 24th Division in front of Guillemont. The 20th Division, having more than maintained its fine reputation in the Ypres Salient by raids in June and July, was withdrawn from the line to the neighbourhood of Wormhoudt about the middle of the latter month; and, after a brief spell of rest and training, had moved to Messines to set free the 24th Division for the second stage of the Somme Battle. But this was only a stop-gap trench tour until the 36th and 50th Divisions should arrive. The 20th Division then handed over the Messines trenches and moved via Doullens by rail and march to the Hébuterne sector to rejoin Lord Cavan's XIV Corps* which was in process of taking over from General Hunter-Weston. The front of the 20th Division extended from the late southern boundary of the 4th Division over the Redan Ridge through John Copse to 16 Poplars on the Hébuterne-Puisieux road. All three brigades were in together, the 60th Brigade with the Ninth Battalion occupying the centre, and the 59th (Greenjacket) Brigade the left of the

* Now composed of the Guards, the 6th, and the 25th Divisions, and the 20th (Light) Division.

line. The traces of the furious battle that had been fought were apparent in the multitude of unburied dead and the obliterated front-line trenches. To reclaim such a wilderness and convert it into a model trench area was a task after the hearts both of the Divisional Commander, and of General Shute of the 59th Brigade. There were, moreover, rumours of an attack to be made by the Division against Serre. The monster working parties of the Salient were now reproduced in the neighbourhood of the Somme. But abruptly, after less than three weeks in the line, the Division was withdrawn on August 16th, on relief by the Guards and despatched on the 18th to the main battle front, upon the scene of which it came four days later, once again in the relief of the 24th Division.

The Greenjacket Brigade was put into line in front of Guillemont, with the 61st Brigade on its left, as far as the south-east corner of Delville Wood, and the 60th Brigade in reserve. The enemy, realizing perhaps that further attacks on the village were imminent, made mighty efforts to break into the British front line. On the 23rd he attacked the 11th Bn. 60th. On the 24th he attacked again, during the relief by the Eleventh Battalion. On the 25th he attacked again under a heavy bombardment that severely wounded Colonel Harington and caused fifty other casualties. All these attacks failed, but throughout the greater part of the time the rain was pouring down. There was hardly a dug-out in the sector—officers and men finding shelter in holes scooped into the walls of the trenches, that, under the combined influence of the rain and the shelling, repeatedly fell in and buried their occupants. The whole area was a shambles of human remains littered over a barren waste of mud and shell holes. On the night 25/26th, when the Division side-stepped five hundred yards to the right, the Tenth Battalion came into a sector of trenches of a horror that can hardly be imagined. Not merely was the front line impossible to be held: it could only be approached by men of the most iron fortitude. The position was dangerously exposed to fire from the village; but that was nothing. What horrified the senses and shocked the imagination was not what might come from outside the trenches, but what was in them. From end to end they were choked with British dead, on their backs, on their faces, hideously doubled up, distorted with pain, blackened and bloated by the sun, the prey of myriad upon myriad of carrion flies, odiously green with corruption. The Eleventh Battalion on the left were in bad trenches, and were surrounded by many of the worst sights and horrors of war: but to visit the trenches of the Tenth Battalion was, in sober seriousness, like a descent to the ante-rooms of Hell. Few brigades ever prepared for a great enterprise in less auspicious surroundings and circumstances. The evening attacks continued. The rain poured relentlessly down. The casualties mounted as they had

never been known even in the worst days of the Salient.* Working parties laboured nightly at digging the jumping-off trenches. It became doubtful whether the men, on top of such a strain, could undertake what was asked of them. The 59th Brigade was destined for the chief part in the operation. General Shute was asked whether, after all that had happened, his brigade was fit to play it. He said that if the men could only have forty-eight hours out of the line to recover from their fatigue they would go anywhere and do anything. The attack was fixed for September 3rd and the Green-jackets were given two days under canvas at the Craters. Here at last the sun came out and the men, basking in it, prepared for their coming trial. The plans for the capture of Guillemont, the nature of the position attacked and the progress of the operations of September 3rd must wait for the account of the third period of the Somme Battle. The command of the Eleventh Battalion was given to Major Cotton, senior company commander of the Tenth, who had risen in that Battalion since September 1914 from the rank of Private Rifleman. Lieutenant-Colonel W. V. L. Prescott-Westcar still commanded the Tenth Battalion and Lieutenant-Colonel H. L. Riley the Twelfth.

The
First Battalion
at Ypres.

The First Battalion at the end of July found itself back once again in the Zwaanhof Farm sector at Ypres, where a year before it had made its attack on International Trench. On the death of Lieutenant-Colonel D. Wood, Major G. W. Barclay, who went out with the Battalion as transport-officer in 1914, was appointed to command. He was killed by a sniper on the 28th July. On August 1st, under the command of Captain H. S. C. Peyton, the Battalion went into the line, relieving the 1st Bn. Somerset Light Infantry. On the 5th it returned to the Canal Bank. On the 8th, during the next relief of the Somersets, the enemy made a gas attack and put down a heavy bombardment which cut all telephonic communication to the rear, including the artillery line. The reply of the artillery and the steady fire of the surviving Riflemen successfully held off the infantry attack for which, according to the statement of prisoners, a fresh brigade had been brought in by the enemy. The casualties however were severe. Four officers were killed, five were wounded and there were two hundred casualties to the men, mostly killed. The bulk of the casualties were experienced in "A" Company which was not more than forty yards from the German line. The gas cloud was not observed until it had already passed over them. On August 16th Captain R. T.

* In nine days of holding the line prior to the Battle of Guillemont the 59th Brigade lost six hundred men, without counting the sick.

Fellowes * arrived to take the command that he was destined to hold almost until the end of the War. On the 20th the Battalion went into the line near Hooze, holding from the Menin Road to the southern edge of Sanctuary Wood—a gigantic front for one battalion; but the enemy was a thousand yards away. "The trenches in Sanctuary Wood were shocking, and in places only about knee high, and wherever one went one was under direct observation from the German lines." After two tours in this locality the 4th Division was relieved and went back to a rest that was immediately broken in upon by a move to Dunkirk. Meanwhile the Second Battalion in the Hohenzollern sector was raided by the enemy on July 29th under a heavy barrage and lost fourteen men. Artillery and Trench Mortars were both active in the sector. From August 7th to 22nd the Battalion rested in billets at Fouquieres-les-Bethune. On the 22nd, on returning to the line, the Adjutant, Captain J. V. Byrne-Johnson, was killed on his way round the front line. On the night 25/26th the Battalion attempted to repeat one of its many successful trench raids. But the enemy had changed his tactics: the famous Ludendorff system of holding the front line had been put into operation and the raid achieved nothing at considerable cost.

Six weeks earlier, on July 4th, the Sixteenth Battalion was called upon to carry out a raid in the Givenchy-Festubert area a few miles north of the 8th Division. The two raids may be considered together, for they furnish an interesting comparison just at the time when the enemy was changing his method. The Sixteenth Battalion was occupying the village line at Festubert. The policy on the 39th Divisional front was to keep up a continual succession of raids; though this policy having been so

The Sixteenth
Battalion raids
"The Pope's
Nose."

long and frequently followed by the British Army was becoming increasingly costly to the battalions, and was gaining less and less owing to the gradual disappearance of the important factor of surprise. The objective of the Sixteenth Battalion was a small salient of enemy trench known as "The Pope's Nose" opposite the point in the British line known as Old Man's Corner, presumably by way of compliment to General Oldman, the 117th Brigade Commander. Colonel H. F. Darell, the Commanding Officer, detailed eight separate parties of his Battalion comprising in all ten officers and two hundred and seventy other ranks, the whole under the orders of Major H. C. Bridges, the Battalion second-in-command, "to raid the enemy's trenches, do as much damage and kill as many of the enemy as possible." In order to reach the objective two water ditches had to be

* Now Major The Lord Ailwyn, D.S.O., M.C.

crossed. The first of these was to be bridged in three places by one of the raiding parties ; the other was known to be bridged already. The wire in front of the enemy trench was cut two days before the raid ; and at 12.35 a.m., the artillery having previously carried out a Chinese bombardment of another part of the line to deceive the enemy as to the place of attack, a box barrage fell behind the Pope's Nose and the raiders set out. They found themselves both expected and prepared for. On reaching the gaps in the wire they discovered that the Germans had ingeniously neutralized the wire cutting by filling the grass with loose coils of wire that clung to the ankles and threw the line into confusion. Hard upon this discovery came a shower of bombs, to make plain that the enemy was ready and waiting, and still further disorganize the raiders. It says much for the fighting spirit and good discipline of both officers and men that they extricated themselves from the wire, dashed into the German front line and took it, after a brisk rough and tumble with bomb and bayonet. But heavy casualties in proportion to the size of the party had already been suffered. Three officers had been killed ; four had been wounded ; two were missing, as also was the R.E. officer in charge of the demolition party. Fully a hundred of the men were out of action. It had been intended to penetrate to the German second line, but in face of the situation that had developed the further advance was abandoned. The R.E. demolition party blew up a machine-gun emplacement and a pumping installation, and then Major Bridges, the only surviving officer, withdrew his men to the British line. From information subsequently received from a prisoner it seems unlikely that the casualties inflicted on the enemy were as severe as those of the Battalion. Sixteen casualties were stated to have been suffered by the infantry pioneer company that occupied the Pope's Nose, another six were caused in the company on their right, and the support company was bombed in its dug-outs and rather severely damaged.

At this date the Germans were still holding their front line in strength. One of the first changes introduced by Ludendorff on his arrival on the Western Front was the system of defence in depth. The actual front line was thenceforward held lightly, the main body of the front-line battalions occupying the support and reserve lines. This system had been put into operation before the Second Battalion carried out its operation against the Hulluch sector on the night August 25/26th. And the enemy had been far too often raided to be caught napping. On the 25th the wire was cut by the 18-pounders. At midnight three companies advanced behind a heavy barrage. Immediately the enemy barrage fell upon his own front line and wire. The Riflemen plunged on through it, entered the German trench and found it unoccupied. The casualties were eleven

officers and one hundred and twenty-one other ranks. No sign of the enemy was seen.

Early in August, the 39th Division left the Festubert–Givenchy sector and, after a fortnight’s training in the back area, moved via Doullens to Bertrancourt behind the Ancre front. Here it was in readiness to take its place in the attack of the Reserve Army on September 3rd. All was ready to begin the third period of the Battle—the struggle for the line Martinpuich–Guillemont on the Fourth Army front, and to outflank and take Thiepval in rear, on the front of the Reserve Army.



"C" COMPANY, 2nd BATTALION, AT LAVENTIE.

Winter, 1914-1915.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME. GUILLEMONT. FLERS-COURCELETTE.

THE battle of September 3rd was an operation almost comparable in extent of front to the great offensive of July 1st, though the objectives were not so uniformly deep. In General Foch's Army Group the French Sixth Army, with four divisions in line, attacking on a front of nearly five miles from the Somme to the Combles valley, was to capture Clery-sur-Somme, Le Forest and Savenake Wood; an advance of nearly two miles. The British Fourth Army, prolonging the attack to the north, from the point of junction with the French at the south-east corner of Angle Wood, was to capture Falfemont Farm and Guillemont, pushing forward in that locality to the outskirts of Leuze Wood, and also the neighbouring village of Ginchy, an advance of over a mile. On the remainder of the Fourth Army front the objectives were less ambitious—Wood Lane (the High Wood—Longueval road) and the German front line in High Wood were marked out for capture. But the real task of the Army was on the right, in conjunction with the French; and from Delville Wood to the Army boundary the operation was little more than a holding attack.

The task of the Reserve Army was to stand fast on the high ground between Pozières and Courcellette in touch with the Fourth Army, and to renew the attack on Mouquet Farm with the Anzac Corps, attack the Thiepval spur in a north-westerly direction from what was known as the Leipzig salient, and renew the operations astride the Ancre. In short, standing fast on the right flank the Reserve Army was to swing its left forward in order to gain the remainder of the high ground; for the British front line, in the northern sector of the battlefield, left the ridge in the locality of Mouquet Farm and, running around the base of the Thiepval bastion, reached the original British line of July the 1st near Authuille, whence it ran north unchanged. The troops employed in the Fourth Army were the XIV Corps, with the 5th and 20th Divisions supported by the 16th Division, on the right adjoining the French, the XV Corps attacking Ginchy with the 7th Division and Delville Wood with the 24th Division, and the III Corps using the 1st and 15th Divisions in the holding attack.

On the Reserve Army front the Fourth Australian Division attacked Mouquet Farm, the II Corps, with the 25th and 49th Divisions carried on as far as the Ancre, and the 39th Division in the V Corps attacked north of the Ancre to gain the spur overlooking St. Pierre-Divion and form a defensive flank. In the attack of the 20th Division against Guillemont, the Tenth and Eleventh, and later the Twelfth, Battalions were employed. In the 39th Division attack north of the Ancre the Sixteenth Battalion was to attack in the 117th Infantry Brigade. No other battalions of the Regiment were engaged.

The villages of Ginchy and Guillemont lie, one above the other, at the head of a well-marked valley that follows, past Mametz, Fricourt, Bécordel and Méaulte, the course of a tributary of the Ancre, and is known as Caterpillar valley from the name given to a wood that flanks its southern slopes north-west of Montauban. Ginchy, almost due east of Delville Wood, is in the neighbourhood of the highest point on the whole ridge five hundred and forty-five feet above sea-level—the village itself well atop of the high ground. Guillemont, one thousand yards south-west, though lower, is even more difficult to attack, for it lies diagonally across the head of the valley, its outskirts along a semicircle of high ground, and the main part of the village cupped in the depression between. On the southern side of the village runs the Montauban ridge; on its northern side the Longueval spur—both meeting immediately east of Guillemont to run up on the north side to the Ginchy plateau and fall away to the east into the Wedge Wood valley which runs south around the Leuze Wood—Falfemont Farm spur to meet the Combles ravine on its journey past Maurepas to the Somme. Guillemont and Ginchy, in short, lie on the higher slopes and crest of the watershed between the valleys of the Ancre and the Somme.

The interval between August 24th and the date of the battle had been utilized to gain ground on either side of Guillemont—to the north by the capture of "ZZ" Trench up to within three hundred yards of the outskirts of the village, and to the south by pressing forward on the Hardecourt spur in line with the French at Maurepas. On September 3rd, the British front line ran round Delville Wood; due south and about four hundred yards west of the outskirts of Ginchy, for a distance of nearly a mile, to the neighbourhood of the railway; then south-west to Guillemont station; along the outskirts of the village (and about one hundred and fifty yards west of them); across the Trônes Wood road; close by Arrow Head Copse, which was in the support line, across the road to Maltz Horn Farm and forward again into the Maurepas valley almost as far as Wedge Wood. The German front line in the Guillemont sector enclosed the village

from the north, incorporating the Quarry—a natural strong point of a most formidable character—the orchards south of the village, and five hundred yards of the deeply sunken Guillemont–Maltz Horn Farm road, bearing back with a switch guarded by an advanced strong point to the deeply sunken Guillemont–Hardecourt road. From Wedge Wood up to Falfemont Farm this switch became the front line. It was, in addition, connected at the wood with the strong defensive system in the deeply sunken road running back behind Guillemont to Ginchy, which continued to the south as an advanced front line but to the north formed the second line of the village defences. The third line was formed by a switch flanking the village to the south and running down the hill to Wedge Wood, a little copse, strongly organized for defence, at the bottom of the valley. The village abounded in strong defensive positions provided by the combination of the undulating ground and the cover afforded by the masonry, the orchards and the organized strong points. Behind the village the deeply sunken Guillemont–Combles road led to the cemetery, where there was a strong point ; and it was covered from the north by the Ginchy trenches, which extended along the high ground to within three hundred yards of Guillemont.

Viewed as a problem of attack Guillemont lay in a British re-entrant : the 5th Division line, as may be seen by the map, although in low ground, was nevertheless beyond the village. On the north side it was partly outflanked ; but, on the other hand, was strongly buttressed by the Ginchy defences. The Army plan was to launch the 5th Division at Falfemont Farm some hours in advance of the main attack in order still further to expose the southern flank of the village ; and to throw the 20th and 7th Divisions at Guillemont and Ginchy together, side by side. The plan of General Douglas Smith of the 20th Division was to make the fullest possible use of the northern shoulder of the re-entrant ; and for the purpose he caused the trenches afterwards known as “ the Gridiron ” to be prepared on that flank so that his left attack could swoop down upon the village from the north. This was to have been the task of the 60th Brigade, but the ten days in the line had reduced it to the strength of only two battalions.* The 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry, the strongest unit to the Greenjacket Brigade, and General Periera’s 47th Brigade of the 16th (Irish) Division joined the 20th Division as a replacement. East and west through the village ran the Guillemont–Combles road, known during the operations as Mount Street. This was the inter-brigade boundary inclusive to the right brigade. South of Mount Street the

* The strength of the 60th Brigade on August 31st was 1,550 rifles. Of these 550 were in the 6th Bn. Oxf. and Bucks L.I.

Greenjackets and north of Mount Street the Irish attacked the village. The southern boundary of the 59th Brigade ran diagonally north-east from a point not far south of where the British front line crossed the Guillemont-Maltz Horn Farm road to the southern outskirts of the village and thence to the south-west corner of Leuze Wood. The northern boundary of the Division ran almost due east, midway between Guillemont and Ginchy. The main objective of the Division was the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road; but there was a line of exploitation, from the south-west corner of Leuze Wood back to the neighbourhood of Ginchy Telegraph, to be reached in conjunction with the 5th Division attack on Leuze Wood. On the front of the 59th Brigade the assaulting troops were the Eleventh Battalion on the right, the Tenth Battalion in the centre, and the 10th Bn. 60th, reinforced by one company of the 11th Bn. 60th, on the left.

The
Tenth and Eleventh
Battalions attack
Guillemont.

General Douglas Smith divided his task into three parts. At zero he would penetrate the northern outskirts of the village—the Quarry—and advance on the southern side as far as the Guillemont-Hardecourt road. Fifty minutes later he would take his line forward to the Ginchy-Guillemont road and its continuation to the south. Two hours after zero he would strike at the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road, the capture of which would give him possession of the whole of the village; and finally he would advance to Leuze Wood. The great merit of General Shute's plan for the use of the 59th Brigade was the precaution he took against the whole of his force being drawn into a *mêlée* at the very beginning or during the successive stages of the attack and then losing the barrage. He therefore split the four divisional objectives into six brigade objectives. The first was the Guillemont-Maltz Horn Farm road with the hitherto impregnable strong point that had broken so many attacks and filled the trenches south of Guillemont with British dead. This was to be taken by the Tenth and Eleventh Battalions of the Rifle Brigade, through which the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry was to pass immediately to attack the second brigade objective—the Guillemont-Hardecourt road. The two 60th battalions, on whose front the two roads were distant from each other a bare fifty yards, were at the same time to advance to the further road at one bound. Meanwhile the Tenth and Eleventh Battalions, having mopped up the first brigade objective, were to reform strictly by time-table and advance through the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry to the third brigade objective, accompanied on the left by one company of the 10th Bn. 60th. This involved the capture of so much of

the Guillemont-Wedge Wood switch-line as lay on the front of the Green-jacket Brigade, and would have the Riflemen aligned along the prolongation to the south of the Longueval-Guillemont road (known in the earlier operations as High Holborn). In this position they would once again be passed through by the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry and the remainder of the 10th Bn. 60th, directed upon the similar prolongation of the Ginchy-Guillemont road some three hundred yards further east, in which the Riflemen would soon after join the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry and from which the whole line would move forward to the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road. From here it was the task of the two Rifle Brigade Battalions to go forward with the 5th Division to the line of Leuze Wood. General Shute's operation orders are referred to in the History of the 20th Division as "a model of lucidity." The praise is not too high. In accordance with the Divisional Commander's plan of encirclement, for the adoption of which General Shute was himself in no small measure responsible, the main weight of the 59th Brigade attack was along the high ground south of the village with the intention, in the military slang of the day, of "pinching it out."

The general situation on the morning of September 3rd was that the French at Maurepas were looking up the valley to Combles with Falfemont farm harassing them on the left flank and the Leuze Wood defences above it peering down upon them. The 5th Division—diagonally across the southern slope of the Guillemont spur and the tip of the Leuze Wood spur—was looking up the Wedge Wood valley with Falfemont Farm on its right front. The 20th Division, aligned roughly north and south, faced Guillemont. The 7th Division, also aligned north and south, but some five hundred yards east of the 20th Division, faced Ginchy. At 9 a.m. the 5th Division attacked, and by 11 a.m. were reported to have taken the farm. At 12 noon the main attack began, heralded by a barrage the intensity of which was like one continuous roar of thunder; and on the 20th Division front by a great sheet of flame and the explosion of a mine—both designed to obliterate the strong point in the Maltz Horn Farm road that had so disastrously affected the operations of previous formations. The mine and the flame served to determine zero exactly for the Eleventh Battalion, but their effect upon the strong point was none; for the mine had hit a stone and turned back "and merely blew up one hundred and twenty feet of unoffending earth"; and if the flame from the projector reached the strong point it did singularly little harm, for none of the bodies of the garrison were found even to have been scorched.

The attack of the Eleventh Battalion was made by "A" and "B" Companies (Captain E. R. Donner and 2nd Lieutenant A. M. Hepburn)

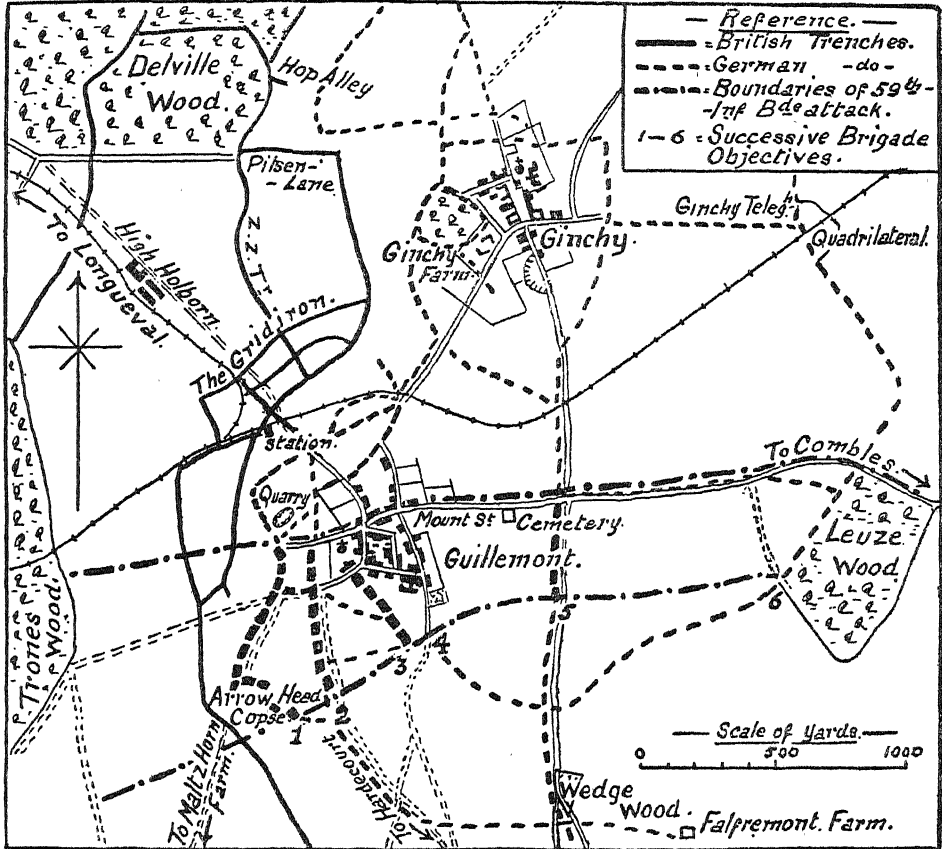
supported respectively by "C" (2nd Lieutenant C. A. C. Murdoch) and "D" (Captain M. L. Cope, M.C.*). The Tenth was led by "C" and "D" followed by "A" and "B." After their brief rest at the Craters both Battalions were in magnificent spirits; the assembly was carried out without a casualty or hitch of any kind; and they breakfasted in their trenches next morning full of heart for their first battle and taut with curiosity and expectation. Zero came; they left their trenches behind a magnificent barrage and fell on the Germans in the first sunken road. The flame projector and the mine had both failed, but so swift were the Riflemen behind the barrage that, almost as soon as it had passed on, the strong point had been entered and the garrison killed. The fury of the fighting in the first sunken road may be judged from the fact that one hundred and fifty German dead were afterwards counted in it. Captain Donner and 2nd Lieutenant Hepburn of the Eleventh Battalion and Lieutenant F. D. Byng of the Tenth all lost their lives at the head of their men; the support companies of both Battalions swarmed forward to assemble in the captured position and the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry passed through with mechanical precision and flung themselves into the first divisional objective, the Guillemont-Hardecourt road, which they captured after killing eighty of the enemy. It was now the turn of the remaining companies of the two Rifle Brigade battalions and one company of the 10th Bn. 60th to take the lead again. In the act of leaving the sunken road Captain Cope, who had lined up his men with the strictness of a ceremonial, was severely wounded† by the enemy barrage which had just begun to fall in the old German front line. But the companies swept on through the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry and poured into the objective beyond. By now the enemy's resistance was flagging. Fifty-two were killed in the Wedge Wood switch; but the Germans began to surrender freely. The Riflemen were armed with phosphorous bombs for clearing dug-outs, of which there were a number. The choice for the occupants was to come out with a good face or be smoked out like a wasps' nest. At one dug-out, however, there was a show of resistance; and resistance of an unpleasant kind. Two men emerged and surrendered, and then instead of a third man a bomb came through the entrance. It happened that the explosion further disabled an already wounded man. There was a cry of "Bombing our wounded!" Half a dozen Riflemen rushed forward and, before the smoke had cleared away, a shower of hand grenades into the dug-out had turned it into a charnel house of dead and dying. Forty-two bodies were taken from it afterwards for burial. By

* Grandson of Sir William Cope, the historian of the Regiment.

† 2nd Lieut. R. C. Berkeley then took over "D" Company, leading it to the final objective, where he was wounded but remained at duty. He was awarded the M.C.

THE BATTLE OF GUILLEMONT.

3rd September, 1916.



THE CAPTURE OF THE VILLAGE BY THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH BATTALIONS.

now the enemy was fairly on the run. The Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry came up, passed through to the next objective, where they were joined by the Rifle Brigade; and at 2 p.m. with the two Rifle Brigade battalions still on the right, the line went forward to the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road which was reached if anything a little in advance of the time-table—for the artillery was still barraging immediately beyond it; and one or two shorts caused casualties. Here "C" Company (2nd Lieutenant Murdoch) of the Eleventh Battalion, which had lost direction by following the Guillemont-Wedge Wood switch-line down into the Wedge Wood valley, reappeared marching up the road under its officer, and driving before it a large number of German prisoners captured in the dug-outs that lined the western face of the road. The haul of prisoners taken by the Eleventh Battalion was considerable. Receipts were in its possession for one hundred and fifty out of the divisional total of five hundred, and that figure should be accepted as a minimum.

It was now time for the advance to Leuze Wood. But the reported capture of Falfemont Farm was clearly incorrect, for the 95th Brigade of the 5th Division was far behind the right of the 59th Brigade. Whilst the companies consolidated the position, Colonel Prescott-Westcar of the Tenth Battalion and Colonel Cotton of the Eleventh established themselves at a joint headquarters in a gigantic shell-hole one hundred yards west of the road in order to discuss the next step. Here they were joined by Colonel White of the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry and later by Colonel Troyte-Bullock of the Somerset Light Infantry. Quite obviously there was no enemy on the immediate front. Equally obviously there was a wide gap on the right that would become two thousand five hundred yards in extent if the Greenjackets advanced to Leuze Wood. And the situation on the left was not without anxiety. In their impetuous advance the Irish Brigade had neglected to mop up this part of the village, with the result that Lieut.-Colonel C. A. Blacklock of the 10th Bn. 60th, in order to protect the left of the 59th Brigade, had been compelled to divert his battalion to carry out that task. The 7th Division attack on Ginchy had not gone well; and in fact the 59th Brigade on the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road were on the point of a small, but for its size, deep salient, extending round the village. That the enemy was determined not to leave the position uncontested was shown by the appearance about this time of a large formed body of infantry marching down the Leuze Wood spur, whether to reinforce the Falfemont Farm position or to counter-attack Guillemont it is impossible to say. The new line was galvanized. Sergeant Rose of "D" Company Eleventh Battalion, who had done splendid work throughout the day, took charge of a Lewis-gun team, and had opened fire on the enemy almost as

soon as they came into sight. The acting company commander turned his second Lewis gun and the rifles of his men on this unique target, and Captain L. H. W. Troughton, the senior Tenth Battalion company commander, directed the fire of the remnants of his Battalion, setting an example himself with a rifle. The attached section of Vickers gunners joined in. It was an astonishing illustration of the fire power of modern weapons to observe the enemy top the rise a thousand yards away, extend to avoid the fire—and then to see the figures of the men fall in a row like vanishing targets on a rifle range.

Not many weeks afterwards Captain Stephenson, R.A.M.C., the medical officer of the Eleventh Battalion, walked over that ground in order to check with his own eyes the effect of the shooting. He found a large number of dead “nearly skeletons already, which surprises me.” In the neighbourhood he found a complete skeleton wearing spectacles—a most uncanny effect.

In such circumstances the four commanding officers decided that a further advance was for the moment impracticable. A company of the Somerset Light Infantry was brought up on the left of the 59th Brigade astride of Mount Street to strengthen the junction with the Irish, and Colonel White threw back his battalion of Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry along the high ground on the right towards the 5th Division line. This was reported to Brigade headquarters, where an extraordinary conflict of testimony was before General Shute. On the one hand from the Division came reports not only that Ginchy was held by the 7th Division but that the 5th Division were in Leuze Wood; on the other hand, from the front line he was informed exactly the opposite. To make matters more confused the Flying Corps reports seemed to confirm the version of the Division. The XIV Corps, spurred by the belief in its possession of Ginchy, Falfemont Farm and the Leuze Wood spur, was girding at the delay of the 20th Division and urging General Douglas Smith to push on to Leuze Wood. In response to this pressure the Divisional Commander gave explicit orders to the two Brigades (47th and 59th) to resume the advance forthwith. Orders reached the front line. On the 59th Brigade front Colonel White was put in command of the whole line, whilst Colonel Blacklock was put in charge of the supports. To the troops in the front line the order seemed like a visitation of madness. But before the appointed hour arrived, General Shute, sceptical as to the accuracy of the Corps information, satisfied himself personally that the 5th Division was still held up in Falfemont Farm, and cancelled the advance on his own responsibility. Not long afterwards the 47th Brigade discovered that the 7th Division was back in its trenches and that the Germans were still established in Ginchy—indeed the individual initiative of an officer of

the King's Liverpools of the 61st Brigade saved the left flank of the 20th Division and all that the Irishmen had gained. The company of Somersets posted astride of Mount Street was at the same time engaged by an enemy counter-attack which it repulsed with bomb and bayonet. And the intelligence sent back from the front line having been confirmed in time to prevent its disbelief resulting in a disaster, the line of the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road was consolidated on the 59th Brigade front—the 7th Bn. D.C.L.I., lent by the 61st Brigade, being posted across the gap on the right to join a defensive flank facing south-east.

The Twelfth Battalion. In the left sector, the 60th Infantry Brigade was now sent in to replace the Irish who were withdrawn, the Twelfth Battalion coming into line on the left of the Tenth Battalion immediately north of the Guillemont-Combles road. The Twelfth Battalion which had been standing by at the Craters, on the Montauban-Carnoy road, was marched to Trônes Wood in the late afternoon; and, on arrival there, received its instructions to move up and relieve the Royal Munster Fusiliers of the 47th Brigade on the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road. The exact location of the battalion to be relieved was uncertain, and there were no guides. Nevertheless, with comparatively few difficulties, the relief was carried out, and, in view of the weakness of the 59th Brigade, the Twelfth Battalion extended its right one hundred yards south of the Guillemont-Combles road. There was no organized trench system, and what existed had been so destroyed with artillery fire as to be useless. Indeed the state of the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road was such as to show that, whatever the British troops may have had to endure from the German artillery, could be more than matched by the sufferings of the enemy from the British bombardment. The road had been pounded into a line of shell craters. Though nearly a mile behind the front line it was littered with human remains of which no attempt at burial had seemingly been made. The bodies had been trampled into the surface until they had become part of it. Here a foot protruded, the bones projecting through the decaying flesh—there the shoulders and back of a man, evidently beaten flat with a spade; hands and elbows stuck out awkwardly at intervals; and elsewhere a blackened face like a hideous india-rubber mask stared accusingly at the sky. Digging in the road was impossible, and what remained of its banks could not well be utilized for defensive purposes. A line was sited immediately west of the road, and then, assisted by the sappers and the divisional pioneer battalion, the conquering infantry spent the night not in sleep but in constructing a defensible line.

By next morning the front had been wired and the trenches had been dug, but the men of the Greenjacket Brigade were completely exhausted. The enemy by then was shelling steadily but, in his ignorance of the whereabouts of the front line, he was necessarily confined to searching fire. Casualties mounted swiftly enough. At 10 a.m. Colonel Prescott-Westcar was wounded, and soon afterwards Lieutenant C. P. Warren, his adjutant. Later a shell that chanced to find the new trench killed Sergeant Rose of the Eleventh Battalion and three more, and wounded the adjutant (Lieutenant Hon. A. M. Bertie) and five others. In addition to Colonel Cotton there were now only two officers left with the Eleventh Battalion. Major E. Lascelles, second-in-command of the Tenth, came up from the transport line and took command of that Battalion in place of Colonel Prescott-Westcar.

Meanwhile there was the remainder of the divisional objective to be captured—a matter depending principally upon the advance of the 5th Division. At 5.10 p.m. the 5th Division attacked again and secured Falfemont Farm, pushing on up the spur towards Leuze Wood. Orders were now issued for the 20th Division to send out patrols and establish them with the 5th Division along the Leuze Wood line. On the 59th Brigade front these were provided by the Somerset Light Infantry (still on loan from the 61st Brigade) and on the 60th Brigade front by the Twelfth Battalion.

These patrols were each to consist of ten men and a Lewis gun. They were to advance under a barrage to the line of the objective, five hundred to six hundred yards in front of the battalion line, and establish posts which would be connected that night, by a continuous trench, all along the divisional front. The Twelfth Battalion was to provide three patrols to be sent out under 2nd Lieutenant R. E. V. Saunders. The operation was planned early in the day; the time of departure, which depended on the success of the 5th Division, was to be given later. The orders specified that Ginchy was now in the hands of the 7th Division. At the time they were issued that was the fact; but, by the time the patrols were due to start, it was no longer correct, for the 7th Division had been once again driven out. This had an important bearing upon the work of the patrols, for, not only was the flank of the 12th Bn. 60th exposed, but, from the high ground behind Ginchy, sniping had been so persistent and accurate through the afternoon that movement along the line had been virtually impossible; and the ground over which the patrols were now to advance was directly commanded by Ginchy and the higher ground east of the village.

At 6.15 p.m. orders were received to start the advance at 6.30. There was just time to pass on the order to the patrols before the barrage came

down. At 6.30 p.m. accordingly, in broad daylight, they started out, were at once met by enfilade fire from Ginchy, and, the two left patrols having lost eight men out of their twenty within fifty yards of the starting-line, took cover in shell-holes, and waited for dark. After dark they moved forward and took up a line in touch with the Somersets. In face of the situation at Ginchy it was out of the question to advance the full six hundred yards; and the left post was made only two hundred and fifty yards out from the line.

Early next morning the 59th Brigade was relieved by the 49th Brigade of the 16th Division, and on the morning of the 6th, the 60th Brigade handed over to troops of the 48th Brigade. Ginchy held out till September 7th when it fell to the 16th (Irish) Division.

Meanwhile along the remainder of the front of the Fourth Army small progress had been made. Wood Lane and High Wood still held out; and the operations of the Reserve Army had met with no success. The French, however, from Maurepas to the Somme had made a great stride forward, capturing Savenake Wood, Le Forest and Clery-sur-Somme, which brought them almost within striking distance of Peronne. From the high ground above Pozières to the vicinity of Combles the ridge was everywhere in the hands of Sir Douglas Haig; and, beyond Combles, the French were in a position to strike upward at the line of the Bapaume-Peronne road. Preparations were hurried forward for another great attack. But before describing the scope of the next battle we must pass along to the extreme left of the Reserve Army on September 3rd and follow the fortunes of the Sixteenth Battalion.

The task of the 39th Division north of the Ancre was to secure a few hundred yards of high ground, west-north-west of St. Pierre-Divion, in order to cover the flank of the 49th Division, advancing up the Ancre valley, which would otherwise be enfiladed. The operation involved entering and holding the enemy's front-line defences on a front of about a thousand yards. The attack was made by the 116th and 117th Brigades with the 4th/5th Bn. Royal Highlanders attached for a special task along the valley of the Ancre. The left attack (117th Brigade) was made by the Sixteenth Battalion the Rifle Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel H. F. Darell) on the right and the 17th Bn. Sherwood Forresters on the left. The whole operation failed despite great gallantry on the part of the troops engaged. Repeated efforts were made without success to renew the assault. But the 49th Division attack on the right had failed completely, and Major-General G. J. Cuthbert, C.B., C.M.G., of the 39th Division decided at 11.50 a.m. that, as the capture of the objectives allotted to the 39th Division was no longer necessary

for the protection of the flank of the 49th Division, he would renew the attacks no further and would withdraw such troops as had penetrated the German defences from the ground they had gained.*

The battle of September 15th begins a new epoch in military history ; for that was the occasion of the first employment of " tanks." At that stage in their development the new engine-of-war was more formidable in appearance than in effect ; its speed was considerably less than foot pace, the steering was far from accurate and breakdowns occurred with embarrassing frequency. Nevertheless the limitations of the tank and its errors of design and construction could hardly have been discovered except on the field of battle ; and the results, however far they may have been from realizing expectations, more than justified the experiment. Like the use of gas, and unlike the flammenwerfer, the tank had come to stay.

By now the main defences of the enemy on the front of the Fourth Army consisted of three trench systems. The first, heavily wired and protected in addition by numerous advanced field fortifications, extended from Combles through the corner of Leuze Wood, half a mile east of Ginchy across the base of the Morval spur and west through the northern sector of High Wood to the Albert-Bapaume road, midway between Pozières and Courcellette, whence, on the front of the Reserve Army, it ran forward through Mouquet Farm to Thiepval. This was known along part of its length as Switch Trench. The second line, connected with Switch Trench by a loop line immediately south of Flers, ran through the southern outskirts of that village and back across a couple of small valleys to Eaucourt-l'Abbaye and Le Sars. South-east of Flers this line ran roughly east to the vicinity of Lesbœufs, where it joined the third line of trenches, a system running south-east from the Butte de Warlencourt past Gueudecourt, Lesbœufs and Morval to Frégicourt. The second line in front of Flers was known as Flers Trench ; east of that village it became Gap Trench. The third line was composed of Gird Trench and Gird Support. These were the main defences, but the intervening ground was intersected by sunken roads, organized for defence, of which the road between Flers and Lesbœufs, known as Bulls Road, and the deeply sunken Ginchy-Gueudecourt road, known as Watling Street, may be taken as examples. And in addition there were machine-gun nests and strong points dotted all over the area, and also defended localities, such as the Hog's Head, Box and Cox behind Flers and the Ginchy Quadrilateral.

Behind these defences, however, there was little that was as yet

* Report of G.O.C. 39th Division on the action.

systematically organized; and the Commander-in-Chief believed that, favoured by suitable weather he could, from the dominating position that had been won on the ridge, descend upon the enemy in such numbers (he estimated that he had an advantage of four to one in men) and with such weight of material as to break through, before rear defences could be improvised, and put the Germans on the run. It was decided not to change the direction of the assault. These three lines of defence and the villages behind them would be taken while the French pressed on towards Peronne; and then the Fourth Army would strike northward at Bapaume; and the Reserve Army, coming up on the left, would push on to Achiet-le-Grand. Thereafter both armies would continue to strike northward, aiming at the communications of the German forces opposite the British Third Army.

Thus were the plans of Sir Douglas Haig reoriented on the eve of the battle of September 15th. He believed that his operations since July 1st had wearied out the enemy. He knew his own superiority in men and artillery. The British Flying Corps had achieved the supremacy of the air. The enemy defences were of nothing approaching the strength of the original line. And there was the tank. The time, said Sir Douglas Haig, had come for the "greatest vigour, boldness and resolution." "Success was to be followed up without hesitation or delay to the utmost limits of endurance." *

Flers-Courcelette.
The Seventh,
Eighth and Ninth
Battalions.

The 14th (Light) Division, after clearing Delville Wood and handing over to the 24th Division, went back to the neighbourhood of Amiens for training. It returned to the line of the XV Corps for the battle of September 15th. The front that it took over extended from the Ginchy-Longueval road to a point five hundred yards east of the northernmost corner of Delville Wood. Its task in the battle, after capturing the successive lines of trenches described above, was to push on beyond the Gird Trench system and take the village of Gueudecourt, a total advance of approximately three miles. On the right of the 14th Division, Lord Cavan's XIV Corps was attacking with the Guards, the 6th and the 56th Divisions side by side—the Guards directed on Lesbœufs, the 6th Division operating towards Morval, both of which villages were to be captured, and the 56th Division completing the investment of Combles by pushing through Bouleaux Wood and seizing the southern face of the Morval spur as far as the Morval-Frégi-court road. On the left of the 14th Division, the 41st Division and the

* *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, I, p. 135.

New Zealand Division,* also of the XV Corps, were to capture Flers. On the left again, the III Corps (47th, 15th and 50th Divisions) was to complete the capture of High Wood and envelop and capture Martinpuich ; whilst the Canadian Corps of the Reserve Army, as soon as Martinpuich had fallen, was to attack Courcellette.

The assault of the 14th (Light) Division was to be begun by the 41st (Greenjacket) Brigade, attacking with the Eighth Battalion Rifle Brigade and the 8th Bn. 60th side by side, supported by the 7th Bn. 60th. In order to deal with a small network of outpost trenches in the locality of Hop Alley, between Ginchy and Delville Wood, two companies of the 6th Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. (lent by the 43rd Brigade to the Greenjackets) were allotted these as a preliminary objective ; and the main attack was to be formed up in trenches actually in advance of that small area. The first brigade objective was Switch Trench, an advance of one thousand yards which necessitated, first, the capture of Pint Trench—a forward field-work extending along the sunken Ginchy-Flers road for five hundred yards and then running down into the Flers valley and connecting up with Tea Support (the trench system beyond the second objective of the Third Battalion in its attack on September 1st). The initial advance of the Greenjacket Brigade therefore consisted in attacking Pint Trench downhill and mounting up to Switch Trench on the top of the Ginchy plateau, nearly half a mile beyond. There the two Seventh Battalions were to pass through—the Rifle Brigade on the right and the 60th on the left—and capture Gap Trench, the prolongation of the Flers line. At Gap Trench the Ninth Battalion and the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I., of the 42nd Brigade, were to pass through and capture Bulls Road, on which they were to stand for two hours before assaulting Gird Trench and Gird Support, and the 5th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry and the 9th Bn. 60th (also of the 42nd Brigade) were to go through and take Gueudecourt. To assist these operations four tanks were allotted to the 14th Division for the initial advance—two to go with the left attack and two, which were first to assist the K.O.Y.L.I. in clearing the Hop Alley locality, with the right. Beyond Switch Trench, where the Divisional front began to widen, the two right tanks were to separate, one pressing on to deal with a strong point in Gap trench and the other following Watling Street, deeply sunken at this part, to join the left tank group and proceed with it along Gas Alley, a communication trench running back almost at right angles from Switch Trench to the junction of Bulls Road and Gird Trench one thousand five hundred yards

* In which was the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, composed of four battalions. This Brigade had been raised in New Zealand at the instigation of Lord Liverpool, the Governor-General, formerly an officer of the Regiment. This was their first big action and in it they acquitted themselves with the greatest gallantry.

in rear. At Gap Trench, however, a tank from the 41st Divisional area was to reinforce the 14th Division to deal with a machine-gun nest in Bulls Road; and after the capture of Flers four more tanks were to come in for the 42nd Brigade attack on Gueudecourt.

The assembly was completed late on the night of September 14/15th. The Eighth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel W. R. Stewart, M.C.) was already in the line which it had been holding since the 12th. At 7 p.m. on the 14th the two companies of the 6th Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. detailed for the attack on the preliminary objective, took over the line of the Longueval-Ginchy road (Pilsen Lane) from "A" and "C" Companies of the Eighth Battalion. At the same time "B" and "D" Companies, the one from a reserve trench in Bernafay Wood and the other from Longueval Alley, moved up to the Battalion assembly position—a new trench that had been specially dug for the purpose in No-man's-land some seventy-five yards in front of Brown Trench, the front line trench north-east of Delville Wood. Here the attacking companies were assembled, "D" (Captain W. C. F. V. Barker-Mill) on the right and "B" (Captain E. F. Prior) on the left, with "C" Company (Captain H. Tryon) in Brown Trench in support of "B," and "A" Company (2nd Lieutenant A. D. Macnaghten) in James Street, at right angles to the front line, in support of "D." Colonel Stewart, with his adjutant and intelligence officer, moved up to an advanced headquarters in Brown Trench, and Major A. C. Sheepshanks and two subalterns formed a reserve of officers at Battalion headquarters in Longueval Alley. This had all been completed by 2 a.m. Meanwhile the Seventh Battalion (Major V. A. M. C. de Calry, 6th Dragoons), which had been employed in the carrying of ammunition and stores to forward dumps in readiness for the battle, moved up to its assembly area from Montauban at 11.30 p.m. on September 14th, and by 1.30 a.m. on the 15th was in position in Delville Wood. The night, though cold, was fine; and the move was completed without difficulty. The Ninth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel T. H. P. Morris, M.C.) moved forward from Fricourt early in the evening to trenches between Trônes and Bernafay Woods. All was accomplished without a hitch. Indeed the only blemish upon preparations carefully made and otherwise faultlessly carried out was the erratic shooting of a battery of 4.2-in. howitzers which, by some error of ranging, repeatedly fired gas shells into James Street ("A" Company the Eighth Battalion) and caused a number of casualties, including 2nd Lieutenant V. R. G. Biddulph, whose place was voluntarily taken by 2nd Lieutenant D. S. Ashforth, the Battalion intelligence officer.

In the hour before the attack, artillery activity died down. At 5 a.m. "A" Company moved up from James Street and lay down in the open,

fifty yards in rear of "D" Company, in readiness to move off in support. Not long after the hour the company commanders of the support battalions began to make ready. In the early dawn of a fine September morning there was nothing to tell the enemy what was coming, for the bombardment was not due to begin until the time to advance.

At 5.30 a.m. the K.O.Y.L.I. and the two tanks provided by the 14th Division, reinforced by a third lent by the Guards, attacked the Hop Alley area and occupied it without opposition, for it had been vacated by the enemy. One of the 14th Division tanks immediately broke down. The other was disabled by a chance shell that damaged its steering, and it was seen by the men of the Ninth Battalion when they came round the east side of Delville Wood "heaving about exactly like an old tortoise." At 6.20 the intense bombardment heralded the hour of zero. All along the army front the great advance was hopefully renewed; the advance that was confidently expected at last to "result in decisive victory."

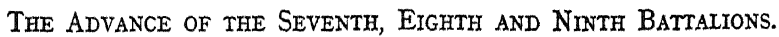
The Eighth Battalion, faithful to the instruction in the brigade order on no account to wait for the tanks, left its jumping-off trenches close behind the barrage. All went uneventfully for rather more than a hundred yards and then the machine guns spoke sharply from the enemy's forward defences in Pint Trench and heavy casualties were suffered. It had been part of the divisional plan that the two tanks on the right, having cleared Hop Alley with the K.O.Y.L.I., should proceed up Ale Alley and take Pint Trench in reverse. In this respect the advance did not conform to plan; but the Riflemen pressed stoutly on, losing most of their officers as they went, took Pint Trench and its machine guns at the point of the bayonet and pushed forward up the rising ground against the switch line. The Seventh Battalion which was immediately in rear of the Eighth caught up the latter in the check at Pint Trench, became involved in the fighting there and lost formation. It was, in consequence, necessary for part of that Battalion to halt and reform. There was considerable confusion, some of the Seventh men being carried forward in the advance of the Eighth. In Pint Trench three machine guns were captured and certain numbers of prisoners were made. The enemy however sought, by a ruse, to throw the attack into confusion: having feigned to surrender, they made for a bomb store and began to bomb the Riflemen from behind. They were rushed and bayoneted and their treachery seriously jeopardized a party of their comrades who were running in with hands up from the switch line—for the Riflemen were not easily held back from meting out retaliation. Meanwhile the Eighth Battalion, now depleted of all its officers but one, had reached the main line (Switch Trench) and captured it without delay, for the protecting wire had been completely obliterated,

and the enemy was in no mood for cold steel. A number of prisoners were made; the dug-outs were cleared; and red flares were lit to signal the capture of the objective. Colonel Stewart and the adjutant, Lieutenant W. A. Crebbin, hurried forward from Brown Trench and immediately put in hand the consolidation of the objective and the protection of the flanks of the Battalion. On the left the 60th were up in line; on the right the Guards had not yet arrived. Enfilade machine-gun fire from that quarter gave considerable trouble to the Eighth Battalion until the Guards on coming into line put the gun out of action and made the flank secure.

It was intended that the Seventh Battalion on arrival at Switch Trench should wait until 7.20 a.m. before moving on to Gap Trench, the second objective. But the men had been already hotly engaged in Pint Trench, which they left shortly before 7 a.m. Their blood was up and they swarmed into the Eighth Battalion objective, flung themselves into the fighting there, and then, without waiting for the time-table, scrambled out the other side and pushed on, with their officers hurriedly reorganizing them for the attack on their own objective. This eagerness led to some casualties from the barrage which they were outrunning. During the halt that followed, the Ninth Battalion, pressing on from behind, caught up the Seventh and they entered Gap Trench together.

But the advance of the Guards Division on the right had met with serious difficulty; for the attack of the 6th Division beyond them had totally broken down in front of the Ginchy Quadrilateral. Hard things were said in the 14th and Guards Divisions of the failure to advance on the right; but the troops of the 6th Division, mown down on their own parapet by murderous fire, were in no way to be blamed. Serious enough in relation to the troops of the 6th Division, this misfortune was equally serious for the flank formation; for the farther the Guards tried to advance on the left the more they prolonged the defensive flank necessitated by the failure on their right and the slower and more difficult became their movement. They were able to reach Switch Trench within a few minutes of the 14th Division. But when it came to moving forward to Gap Trench, which, to make matters worse, ran back on their front almost to Lesbœufs and thus presented them with the problem of advancing considerably farther to their objective than the Riflemen on their left—even the Guards were unequal to the task. The failure of the 6th Division thus became a matter of the most vital concern to the Seventh Battalion two miles away; for the inability of the Guards to keep pace with the attack on the second objective resulted in the Rifle Brigade being taken in rear by heavy machine-gun fire from the right. The leading waves, as we have seen, had rushed on so closely behind the barrage that they were already waiting in shell

15th September, 1916.



holes to dash into their objective when the barrage should lift and before the machine guns opened. But the rear companies and the Ninth Battalion following up were severely punished and the right rear of the Seventh Battalion in particular was unable to make further progress until the Coldstream Guards, overcoming their difficulties with magnificent dash, had dealt with the enfilading machine guns. Meanwhile, however, the forward companies under Captain R. C. Brown ("D" Company) and Sergeant Blunt, had occupied Gap Trench, and part of the Ninth Battalion coming up on the left was pushing on towards Bulls Road and Gueudecourt.

The situation now becomes difficult to reconstruct. So much that made for confusion had already taken place; and so many officers had been killed and wounded that reliable information is not easy to come by. Touch with the 60th on the left had been maintained throughout; but the 60th were not in touch with the 41st Division, although that formation was advancing on Flers and its tanks were spreading a blind terror amongst the Germans in the village. The Eighth Battalion with wanderers from the Guards Division and from other units mixed in with it, in close touch with the 8th Bn. 60th, was firmly established in Switch Trench consolidating. But, except for the colonel and the adjutant, there was now no officer remaining; for 2nd Lieutenant J. A. Gould, the only survivor among the company officers, was carried on with the advance of the Ninth Battalion and did not rejoin until next day. Before long however shelling, that steadily grew in heaviness, began to be directed by the enemy upon Switch Trench and at about half-past ten a shell burst over the impromptu Battalion Headquarters in an unfinished dug-out shaft. Colonel Stewart was wounded in the shoulder; the medical officer, Lieutenant Strachan, in the hand; and there was now only Lieutenant Crebbin, the adjutant, remaining unhurt. He hurriedly despatched a runner to the brigade, by whom Major Sheepshanks, Lieutenant C. H. Wenham and 2nd Lieutenant J. R. Abbey were sent forward. Major Sheepshanks then assumed command; and directed all his efforts towards consolidation, but it was far from easy to keep the men steadily at work. They had held the front line for four days prior to the attack; they had passed through the strain and excitement of the battle and they were only anxious for sleep. Despite this handicap, a considerable amount of work was done. Advanced posts were established in case of counter-attack and, so far as might be, the stragglers were sorted out and sent to their respective battalions. During the afternoon the shelling died down. In the evening the rain came, and with the rain came the Brigade Commander, Brig.-General Skinner, bringing Major X. R. A. de la Chapelle of the Fifth Battalion to relieve Major Sheepshanks in command. The total strength of the Battalion was now one hundred

and sixty men. Every company commander had been killed. 2nd Lieutenant Ashforth, the intelligence officer, who volunteered to take the place of 2nd Lieutenant Biddulph when the latter was killed, was also dead; Lieutenant N. F. H. Mather of "B" Company was mortally wounded; and six other officers, including the colonel and the doctor, had been hit. A miserable night was spent in the captured trench. Those who were under cover with the wounded were so harrowed by the suffering and so sickened by the smell of blood, that "it was a question whether the wet and cold outside were not preferable to the stench inside." But they were happy in the knowledge that they had done well and that their work was being carried on equally well by other battalions of the Regiment. And the view next morning was a "cheering one." They could see "a wide stretch of country with Flers on our left, Gueudecourt in front, Lesbœufs on our right, and, on the far hill on our left front—Bapaume."

The Seventh Battalion—strength estimated at five Officers, one Warrant Officer, four Sergeants and one hundred and fifty Riflemen—was holding about five hundred yards of Gap Trench in touch with the 7th Bn. 60th on the left. Companies and platoons had been so completely disorganized in the advance that no reorganization was possible. By noon a party of twenty-four Guardsmen (twenty Irish and four Coldstream) that had strayed into the Seventh Battalion area had been formed into a platoon under Sergeant Hennessy of the Rifle Brigade and had joined Captain R. C. Brown in "D" Company, perhaps the only occasion during the war on which men of either Regiment served under an officer of the other. But Captain Brown had been having a field day. In the first objective, which he entered with the Eighth Battalion, "I found myself over a dug-out. A Boche came out; he did not look 'kamarad' enough, so I shot him." Another, seeing this, hurried to make the terms of his own surrender unmistakably clear, and was sent back "running and squealing." Then a group of ten or more Germans were taken; and then Captain Brown hurried on with his men to Gap Trench. Approaching that, they found themselves in advance of the time-table; waited in shell holes until 7.45 a.m.; and then rushed the trench with a party of the Ninth Battalion. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1 p.m. touch was gained with the Guards who had come up on the right. And, when night came, the garrison of Gap Trench found themselves far better off than their comrades in the objective behind; for Gap Trench was sufficiently far from the front line to possess the amenities of dug-outs. Captain Brown and his men found themselves in unexpected comfort. He himself had "a well-furnished Boche cubby hole; and took a greatcoat and blanket and ground sheet for which I was thankful in the next two nights in a very cold open trench. I had

plenty of food too—brown bread, dried figs, prunes, dates, ‘Hammel fleisch,’ aerated water, lump sugar and cheese.” In spite of the quiet of the night Major de Calry, the Battalion Commander, was not without anxiety ; for although the Ninth Battalion was somewhere in front nobody seemed quite certain of how much of it was there or what line it held. All that was definitely known was that the 42nd Brigade had not reached Gueudecourt. And the Seventh Battalion, though it had lost fewer officers than the Eighth Battalion, had lost at least as many men and had no great numbers to resist a counter-attack should such a thing develop. But if the tanks had done nothing else they had very seriously undermined the moral of the enemy ; and in fact no serious counter-attack was made.

The Ninth Battalion, because of the necessity of changing direction twice—first on reaching the Ginchy—Longueval road, when it ceased to march north-east and marched north across Hop and Ale Alleys ; and secondly when it formed half right, after crossing the second of these obstacles, in order to align itself parallel to the objectives—was guided by Lieutenant W. H. Purvis, the commander of “B” Company, steering by compass bearing. Lieutenant Purvis had recently joined the Battalion ; and he had joined in circumstances so unusual as to be worthy of record. On September 25th, 1915, in the attack on the Bellewaarde spur, Captain J. R. Purvis (“B” Company) was killed at the head of his men. His father, more than sixty years old, who had long since retired from active life on his plantation in the South Seas, and longer still from the Royal Navy, was unable to bear the loss, except he himself carried on the work his son had been doing. By what expedient this fine old gentleman overcame the strict regulations of the War Office, and, at an age bordering on antiquity, succeeded in becoming a Second Lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade, is not revealed. But he did so. More, he contrived to be passed for active service and posted to his son’s battalion. Having achieved so much it was more or less in the nature of things that on reaching the Ninth Battalion on July 26th, 1916, he should be given his son’s platoon.* But the dispensations of Fate were not yet over ; for on August 9th, the anniversary of the promotion of Captain J. R. Purvis to the command of “B” Company, the commander of that company was accidentally injured ; and Lieutenant W. H. Purvis was appointed to command the company at the head of which his son had lost his life nearly a year before.

The Battalion moved from its trenches near Trônes Wood at zero hour, marching in lines of platoons in file, with room on the left for the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I. to come in between the Riflemen and Delville Wood. At 6.45 a.m., having crossed Hop and Ale Alleys and reached the north-east corner of

* No. 7, “B” Coy.

the wood, the direction of the advance was changed; the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I. deployed and took position on the left flank; and the two battalions moved on to pass through the Greenjacket Brigade on its objective. The Ninth Battalion was now advancing on a two-company front. "A" (Captain A. D. McKinstry) on the right, and "B" (Lieutenant Purvis) on the left, with "C" (Captain H. W. Garton) in support of "A", and "D" (Captain J. A. Merewether) in support of "B." Within four hundred yards of Switch Trench the companies opened into extended order, and here, as they began toiling up the slope, machine-gun fire broke out. Hitherto there had been few casualties, such as had occurred having been caused by desultory shell fire. The advance, despite the machine-gun fire, was steadily continued, the companies maintaining their dressing; and the four lines of the Ninth Battalion crossed Switch Trench in good order, and advanced on Gap Trench beyond it.

Undoubtedly at this stage the infantry were considerably perplexed by the artillery. "The barrage throughout the attack was extremely hard to follow: it was difficult to decide what was the line of the barrage owing to the depth of the zone location of the bursting shells."* Moreover, the troops were badly handicapped by the pace at which it moved. Fifty yards a minute was the time allowed in the barrage table. At the beginning of the action when the fighting had been severe this seems to have been a reasonable allowance. But between Switch Trench and Gap Trench there were no enemy defences to hold up the advance, and the distance was some six hundred yards. The machine-gun fire grew in volume; but the troops could not rush the machine guns, for that would have involved passing through their own barrage. They settled down in shell holes to wait for the barrage to pass beyond Gap Trench, bringing Lewis guns into action against the enemy machine guns. On "B" Company front, a German was observed lying in the long grass and signalling back presumably to a machine-gun team in the rear of him. A Rifleman was given the line, took careful aim, and fired. The German leapt convulsively out of his hiding place and spun over dead. But the machine-gun fire went on, casualties grew, and the shelling began to be troublesome. Captain A. F. Willmer, the second-in-command of the Battalion, was in charge of the joint advance of the two forward companies. To him Lieutenant Purvis decided to go with a view to obtaining reinforcements. In his temporary absence he put Lieutenant R. Hyde Thomson in charge of "B" Company, but Lieutenant Hyde Thomson was almost immediately afterwards shot through both eyes and blinded. Soon afterwards the barrage passed over Gap Trench, and the Ninth Battalion followed the Seventh into it.

* Report of B.G.C. 41st Brigade on the Action.

The barrage was now to be stationary for an hour before the Ninth Battalion advance was resumed on Bulls Road and the Gird Line. The interval was filled up with reorganizing the companies and clearing up Gap Trench. "D" Company was given the task of assisting the Seventh Battalion in mopping up. One of the machine guns that had caused so many casualties in the advance was captured still hot, with two of the crew wounded beside it. Meanwhile Captain Willmer in the communication trench, Gas Alley, was settling with Lieutenant Purvis and Captain Merewether the final details of their advance to the Gird Line. 8.30 a.m. came; the barrage began to move forward; and the Riflemen followed it. But the check on the right was now beginning to be a serious handicap to the advance. The Guards did not arrive at Gap Trench until considerably after midday. In consequence the flank of the Ninth Battalion was entirely unprotected. Gas Alley, the communication trench, ran diagonally across the front; and, in the storm of machine-gun fire from the right and also from the left, the attacking waves were driven into it for shelter. Written orders were then issued by Captain Willmer directing the line to make a half-right form at 10.20 a.m., and attack Gird Trench; following which the 9th Bn. 60th would pass through to take Gird Support. This was anticipating the programme to be carried out on leaving Bulls Road. The line was reorganized and pressed forward again, but Bulls Road was strongly held by machine-gun posts. According to the plan of battle these were to have been dealt with by a tank. Unless that could now be done the right form of the Battalion must be carried out in the very teeth of the guns.

The Riflemen pushed on towards their objective, making use of shell holes for cover. But the machine-gun fire grew heavier. The tank had been put out of action by a shell, and was blazing furiously on their left. The barrage seemed to be growing thin. And there was no sign of troops on either flank. The company commanders set a dashing example to their men, preceding them gallantly in the shell-hole-to-shell-hole advances. At last Lieutenant Purvis, unable to see any troops coming up on the left,* brought up a Lewis gun to make a strong point there to protect that flank and got his men into a rough line of shell-hole posts so that, in the event of a further advance proving impossible, a defensive line securing the battalion gains could be established. As he passed along the front of his men he found the dead body of Captain Merewether, his fellow company commander, who had just been shot down. Almost immediately afterwards he

* This statement is no reflection upon 5th Bn. K.S.L.I. or the troops of the 41st Division, for the Rifle Brigade having done a half-right form, the left of "B" Company was pointing towards Gueudecourt at a time when the main advance was not beyond Flers.

fell himself with a broken leg and a severed femoral artery. The right came to within just over a hundred yards of Gird Trench but the left found Bulls Road impassable. The line of shell holes was roughly linked up; and there the advance was stayed. Later in the afternoon the Guards, having overcome their difficulties, came up on the right and took over from the right of the Rifle Brigade as far as Gas Alley. Just before dark a counter-attack was made by the enemy. It was easily repulsed by Lewis-gun and rifle fire. A bombing block was made by Sergeant Gerrard in Gas Alley, a little distance in front of the main defences. This block was successfully defended against a number of sorties from Gird Trench. Patrols out in front of the battalion position captured several prisoners, some of whom had strayed from a unit sent forward to relieve the line and one of whom had taken part in the abortive counter-attack. The line now held by the Ninth Battalion was somewhat in advance of that taken up by the Guards; and at 9.30 p.m. an order came up to fall back in conformity. But the ground had been dearly captured, and the four surviving officers had no mind to give it up. They held a council of war and decided, in their own words, "that the Brigade would not retire." At 4 a.m. on the 16th they were relieved (excepting Sergeant Gerrard's post, which stayed till 6.30) by the 43rd Infantry Brigade on the ground they had refused to give up. The Seventh Battalion was relieved at the same time. The Eighth stayed in till next evening. It was seriously proposed to use them in a fresh attack on Gueudecourt on the following day; but in view of their weakness the proposal was abandoned.

In truth the day, though bringing important successes to the Fourth Army—not the decisive victory that had been predicted, but still substantial gains—had been costly, especially to the Guards and the 14th Divisions. The Battalions of the Rifle Brigade had suffered severely, especially in officers. The losses of the Seventh and Eighth Battalions have already been given. The Ninth Battalion lost Colonel Morris, Captain Willmer, all the company commanders, and many subalterns. The Colonel and second-in-command were both mortally wounded. Captain A. D. McKinstry had succeeded to the command of the Battalion during the battle.

The 14th Division (using the 43rd Brigade) was ordered to resume the attack on its objectives. The 61st Brigade of the 20th (Light) Division was lent to the Guards. The 6th Division was ordered to take the Quadrilateral. And the battle was resumed next morning with the intention of taking Gueudecourt and Lesbœufs. The 61st Brigade, attacking side by side with the 3rd Guards Brigade, succeeded in taking Gird Trench (The Blue Line) between Lesbœufs and Morval. The Guards, however, did not

reach the objective. The 14th Division on the left made little or no progress, and were relieved by the 21st Division. It was somehow reported in the hand-over that the "Blue Line" was in British possession. The Blue Line on the front of the Guards and 6th Division, meant the line of Gird Trench past the outskirts of Lesbœufs and Morval. On the front of the 14th Division, however, it was an alternative name for Bulls Road, the intermediate objective of the 42nd Brigade between the second and third Divisional objectives. Which Blue Line was meant when the 21st Division was credited with its possession is unknown, and really hardly matters; for in point of fact neither was in British possession—a state of affairs fraught with the most serious mischief for the Tenth and Eleventh Battalions of the Regiment.

A Fiasco.

On the night of the 16th September the 20th (Light) Division relieved the Guards; and the 59th (Green-jacket) Brigade took over from the 3rd Guards Brigade in Gap Trench and an unnamed communication trench that ran into it from the Switch line. The night was wet, and of a blackness such as could only be experienced in a featureless waste of slime. An intermittent glimmer of starlight through the clouds served only to deepen the darkness. The guides were uncertain of the way. There were no landmarks. The ground was littered with dead and wounded. The very garrisons of the trenches that at infrequent intervals were passed over, were ignorant of where they were or where the front line might be. The march to the line was a nightmare. The relief was of the haziest character. Outgoing company commanders, naturally anxious to get their men back out of the shelled area before daylight, were pardonably unwilling to discuss the line, had they been capable of indicating it on a map, which is to be doubted. The Tenth and Eleventh Battalions were intended to occupy a trench between Gap Trench and the Lesbœufs—Ginchy road. The 11th 60th were to take over Gap Trench, and the 10th 60th was to be in support in the Switch line. By some mistake, on the part of the guides, "D" Company of the Eleventh Battalion was directed into the trench of the 11th 60th and saw no more of its own battalion until the Brigade was relieved. The trenches were shallow and narrow. Daylight revealed villages in a valley; but, in the absence of some known landmark, there was nothing by which to determine what villages and what valley. A joint battalion Headquarters was made in a shell crater near the switch line; but beyond the Headquarters it was impossible to stir without attracting both shells and bullets.

To the staff of the XIV Corps, necessarily regarding the situation from the larger aspect of the battle as a whole, the problem presented no diffi-

culties. The 61st Brigade had handed over to the 60th Brigade in the Blue Line north of Gas Alley. There was, thus, a pocket in the front of the 59th Brigade that only needed to be punched out, whereupon the jumping-off position for the next big attack would be ready in our hands. General Shute was ordered to attack with the 59th Brigade at 6.30 p.m. and capture the intervening strip between the 61st Brigade on his right, and the 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division on his left. This involved repeating the very manœuvre that the Ninth Battalion had been unable to accomplish on the 15th; it involved deploying the troops outwards to both flanks over the open in daylight, before they could make their attack. But the artillery of the Guards Division undertook to put down a covering barrage. Accordingly the Tenth and Eleventh Battalions were ordered to deploy outwards to the right; the 11th Bn. 60th was to come up on the left; and all three battalions were to charge the trench together. "D" Company of the Eleventh Battalion which prolonged the line of the 60th and was cut off from its own comrades, was designed by Colonel Cotton to move in support of the attack, but the bearer of the warning order to stand by was killed as he flung himself into the trench; and the order for the attack never arrived.

At 6.30 p.m. the artillery put down the barrage; but it was quite insufficient to protect a movement of the kind contemplated, and totally inadequate to cut the formidable belts of wire behind which the Germans were entrenched. After losing eleven officers and four hundred men the remnants of the three attacking battalions which went into action less than seven hundred strong all told, were compelled to make the best way possible back to their trenches. In this they were helped by the growing dark. The 11th 60th succeeded in bombing down Gap Trench to within a short distance of Gird Trench and there they hung on, repelling an effort by the enemy to turn them out. But the promised co-operation of the 62nd Brigade of the 21st Division in bombing down Gird Trench came to nothing—for after all they were not in Gird Trench to do so; and in any case, as it turned out afterwards, they had received no orders to take part in the proceedings. The remaining Battalion of the 59th Brigade was sent forward to be ready to effect what the other three had been unable to achieve, if Colonel Blacklock, the Battalion Commander, should see any opportunity to do so. It seems superfluous to add that no such opportunity arose; and, in place of resuming the attack, orders were issued for the digging of a jumping-off line by the Greenjackets reinforced by Sappers and Pioneers, and later by the King's Liverpool Regiment of the 61st Brigade. The task was carried out by September 20th, and the Guards returned to renew their attack on Lesbœufs.

Meanwhile, on September 18th the 6th Division at last succeeded in taking the Quadrilateral. The left flank of this attack was materially helped by a strong fighting patrol sent out by the Twelfth Battalion under Lieutenant Breckon and 2nd Lieutenant Ruddell, which, by taking the Germans in rear as they fell back upon their trenches, captured a machine gun and twenty-six prisoners, of which Corporal Chitty's section accounted for fourteen. At the same time the garrison of a bombing post of the same battalion observed a party of the enemy collecting for a counter-attack behind a barricade in the trench on their front. Rifleman Yates of this section immediately rushed out alone, hurling bombs as he went, and scattered the party in confusion. The advance of the 6th Division following upon the work of the 59th Brigade completed the preparation for the next big effort. When the Guards came back to the line on the 20th it was in the expectation of resuming the offensive next day. But the weather since the 15th had been unremittingly wet. The mud had become impassable. To have renewed the attack over the ground in its then condition would have put its success into grave jeopardy. It was postponed until the 25th.

The Third Phase of the Battle of the Somme was at an end.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME. MORVAL. THE TRANSLOY RIDGE.

THE 14th (Light) Division was withdrawn from the Somme and sent back to the neighbourhood of Arras, where the Seventh Battalion went into the line at Wailly, the Eighth went into support at Rivière, and the Ninth took over trenches in front of Agny. Colonel R. C. Maclachlan, now recovered from his wounds, resumed command of the Eighth Battalion on September 23rd. The 20th (Light) Division gave place to the Guards and waited a few days in the neighbourhood of Treux for re-employment. The 59th (Greenjacket) Brigade settled down in Morlancourt and the Twelfth Battalion in Ville-sur-Ancre. Reinforcements were hurriedly absorbed and training undertaken. The Thirteenth Battalion (with the 34th Division) had left the Somme area in the middle of August, and, after a series of moves, had gone into the line at Cité Calonne (Lens) attached to the 63rd (Naval) Division. In this area it remained until the middle of October. The Sixteenth Battalion remained in the V Corps area north of the Ancre, performing the normal trench routine.

The tour of the 4th Division in the trenches at Hooze came to an end early in September, when the First Battalion with the remainder of the 11th Brigade were unexpectedly sent to Dunkirk. "Here," says the Battalion narrative, "we played with some success the rôle of a stage Army. The Brigade used to march each day into Dunkirk with much pomp and advertisement." (They were billeted at Ouderkerque, five miles away.) "We then hid ourselves away among the docks and along the sand dunes—one battalion each day embarking in trawlers and mine-sweepers and disembarking half an hour later in the back waters on the docks. Then in the evening we marched back by devious routes to our billets and pretended that we were not the same people that had started out that morning."

They never succeeded in understanding on whom this somewhat obvious deception was intended to impose, or whether it attained its object. "No doubt," the narrative sagely concludes, "we were never meant to." After four days of solemn farce the Brigade returned to Bollezeele in the hope

of its promised rest. But next day orders came to move to the Somme, and within forty-eight hours the Battalion was in billets at Allonville, in which village and at Vaux-sur-Somme three weeks were spent in training. The Second Battalion continued to hold the line in the Hohenzollern Sector ; and the Third Battalion remained below the Vimy Ridge.

The partial success of September 15th spurred on Sir Douglas Haig to another great effort. The results achieved by the tanks had fallen below expectations, but enough had been done to show of what they were capable with mechanical improvement, correct employment and a proper scheme of co-ordination with the infantry. Where **Breaking through the Defence** they had succeeded in breaking through the defence they had undoubtedly created a terror as deadly as that which the Germans inspired in the French Colonials by the employment of gas at the Second Battle of Ypres. What troops indeed could have been expected to resist those squat and hideous monsters that came clanking, rattling and snorting through the slime of the battlefield, pushing down obstacles, clambering over trenches, vomiting machine-gun bullets and 6-lb. Hotchkiss shells, and seemingly invulnerable except to the direct hit of a field gun ? If only the whole body of tanks could have succeeded in reaching the enemy's trenches on September 15th Sir Douglas Haig might have won his decisive victory. But the secret trials of the tanks at Hatfield had shown that the tank's worst enemy was not guns but mud. And the mud of the Somme battlefield had already become something that was to be unrivalled in the history of quagmires—except perhaps a year later by the morasses of Passchendaele and Poelcappelle.

Nevertheless a powerful blow had been struck ; an important advance had been made. Courcellette, Martinpuich, Flers had all been captured and the line ran along the outskirts of Lesbœufs and Morval. Comblès was already outflanked. The French were at Bouchavesnes and were ready to strike up to Sailly-Saillisel. All was in order for renewing the attack on September 21st except the weather. But the weather was torrential. Four days' delay were necessitated,* during which the enemy was feverishly throwing up new entrenchments ; and the ground, already water-logged, was becoming a desert of mud thickly pock-marked with shell holes waist deep, or deeper, in water. At last, on the 25th, the Fourth Army and the French struck side by side. The French took Rancourt and Frégicourt. The XIV Corps of the Fourth Army took Morval and

* Owing to the impossibility of observing for the necessary artillery preparation to reduce the enemy's new positions.

Lesbœufs with the 5th, 6th and Guards Divisions. The 21st Division, held up on the 25th, captured Gueudecourt on the 26th with the help of tanks that more than justified their employment. Cavalry was hurried forward to go through the gap. But it was not yet a gap, and the conditions were none for cavalry. On the III Corps front the line was taken forward to the neighbourhood of Le Sars. And the Reserve Army, attacking from Courcellette to the Ancre, stormed Thiepval and pushed forward up the Spur above it. Still no decisive victory. Combles, now almost surrounded, was evacuated by the enemy and entered by the Allies on the 26th. Still, however, no decisive victory. Despite the British preponderance of men and material; despite the loss of large numbers of prisoners and heavy casualties, the resistance of the enemy was stubbornly maintained. But Sir Douglas Haig was of opinion that the enemy's strength was ebbing and that his stubbornness was at the point of collapse. It was known that since the beginning of the battle large numbers of German Divisions had been called on to reinforce the front and that many of these had been twice engaged. Preparations for staging another great attack were hurried forward; and meanwhile certain reorganizations were made in the Allied line.

The 20th (Light) Division came back to the line on September 26th in relief of the 5th Division close to Morval. The Twelfth Battalion went into the front line south-east of Morval with the 60th Brigade and, whilst there, carried out the difficult task of pushing forward advanced posts behind patrols in order to make ground. The patrols, once again under 2nd Lieutenant Ruddle, were engaged by a strong party of the enemy and came under heavy fire. But the Battalion's task was successfully accomplished and the posts were established in touch with the French. The Greenjacket Brigade found itself in reserve south of Guillemont, the Eleventh Battalion taking over trenches adjacent to those it dug on September 4th after the battle. On the following day, however, in obedience to arrangements made between the Allies by which Morval was to pass to the French for the purpose of their operations against Sailly-Saillisel, the 20th Division handed over to the 2nd French Division and withdrew to Carnoy, preparatory to relieving the 21st Division in the Gueudecourt sector—there to effect an extension to the left of the XIV Corps front corresponding to what had been handed over on the right, and to take post in readiness for the coming battle. The 61st Brigade held the line with the 60th Brigade in support and the Greenjackets in reserve, and carried out a preparatory operation in conjunction with the flank Division of the XV Corps in order to gain jumping-off ground for the attack. On the night of October 3rd/4th the 60th Brigade came up on the right and

the 61st closed in to the left to make room. These two Brigades were to make the attack with the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry, the Twelfth Battalion Rifle Brigade, the 7th Bn. King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 12th Bn. King's Liverpool Regt. from right to left. In support were the 12th Bn. 60th and the 7th Bn. Somerset Light Infantry with the 5th Bn. K.S.L.I. and the 6th Bn. D.C.L.I. in reserve. The 59th Brigade was in Divisional reserve behind Trônes Wood.

The advance was now developing rather north-east than north. The main objective of the Fourth Army was the Ridge projecting north from the Morval spur between Lesbœufs-Gueudecourt and Le Transloy-Beaulencourt. The enemy's principal defensive line was now a strongly wired trench system sited on the western slope of the high ground between Bapaume and Sailly-Saillisel. This system was in the neighbourhood of two thousand yards from the new British front line; and the aim of the operation was to advance within striking distance, in order that a later operation might break through it. The ridge that formed the British objective, though considerably lower than the main ridge for which they had battled since July 1st, was a formidable piece of ground to attack, seamed with sunken roads, torn by repeated bombardments and the operation of the weather into a wilderness of viscid mire, and intersected with trenches or fragments of trenches excellently sited for fire effect. The previous advance had come to an end at the bottom of the Lesbœufs-Gueudecourt valley. The whole of the British position, as far back as the line of Delville Wood-Ginchy, was under direct observation from the enemy's forward trenches; and it followed that artillery positions were extremely difficult to select.

Such was the country over which the advance was to be made. It remains to add that a change had now taken place in the German method of holding the line. The series of advances behind artillery barrage, and the terrific artillery preparation for the battles, in which the enemy trenches had been systematically obliterated, had proved the total inadequacy of trenches against an organized attack. But the very vigour of the bombardments had provided its own reply. The whole area was riddled with shell holes which, with a small amount of work, gave equally effective cover as a trench whilst being undistinguishable in appearance from the surrounding country. The German reply to the British artillery was organized shell-hole defences. It took some weeks to realize what had happened, and even longer to evolve a new tactics in answer. The main defensive lines continued to be made and wired in rear; but, in place of a front line, the enemy held an area of shell-hole defences, organized in depth, of which the chief defensive weapon was the machine gun. This gave no

target for the artillery : it was difficult for the tank to detect : the very infantry were often unaware of its existence until a tornado of machine-gun fire had broken their attack and dispersed them.

The Twelfth Battalion at Rainbow Trench. October 5th was the date chosen for the operation. Once again the rain intervened and caused a postponement of two days. At 1.45 p.m. on the 7th the attack was due to begin. The assembly of the Twelfth Battalion on the left of the 60th Brigade, in the trenches and roads east-south-east of Gueudecourt, was effected without difficulty during the previous night. " A " Company on the right and " B " Company on the left were to lead the attack on Rainbow Trench, the enemy front line. The remainder of the Battalion was to pass through and lie down in the open behind the barrage, ready to push along the top of the ridge to Cloudy Trench, the second objective, as soon as the guns should lift. But the enemy was on the alert. Perhaps he had obtained some clue to the project. At 11.30 a.m. one of his aeroplanes flew low over the assembly area and no fire was accurate enough to bring it down. It made a thorough reconnaissance and flew back with its tidings. At 1.20 p.m. began a heavy bombardment of the front line, causing between thirty and forty casualties in the Rifle Brigade alone. At the same time a barrage fell on the positions behind, to hamper the movement of reinforcements. The operation was sufficiently difficult without this unlooked-for obstruction, for folds in the ground screened both Rainbow and Misty Trenches from direct observation, and the task of wire-cutting had been a serious problem. On the very morning of the attack patrols reported the wire still uncut, and the guns were turned on afresh.

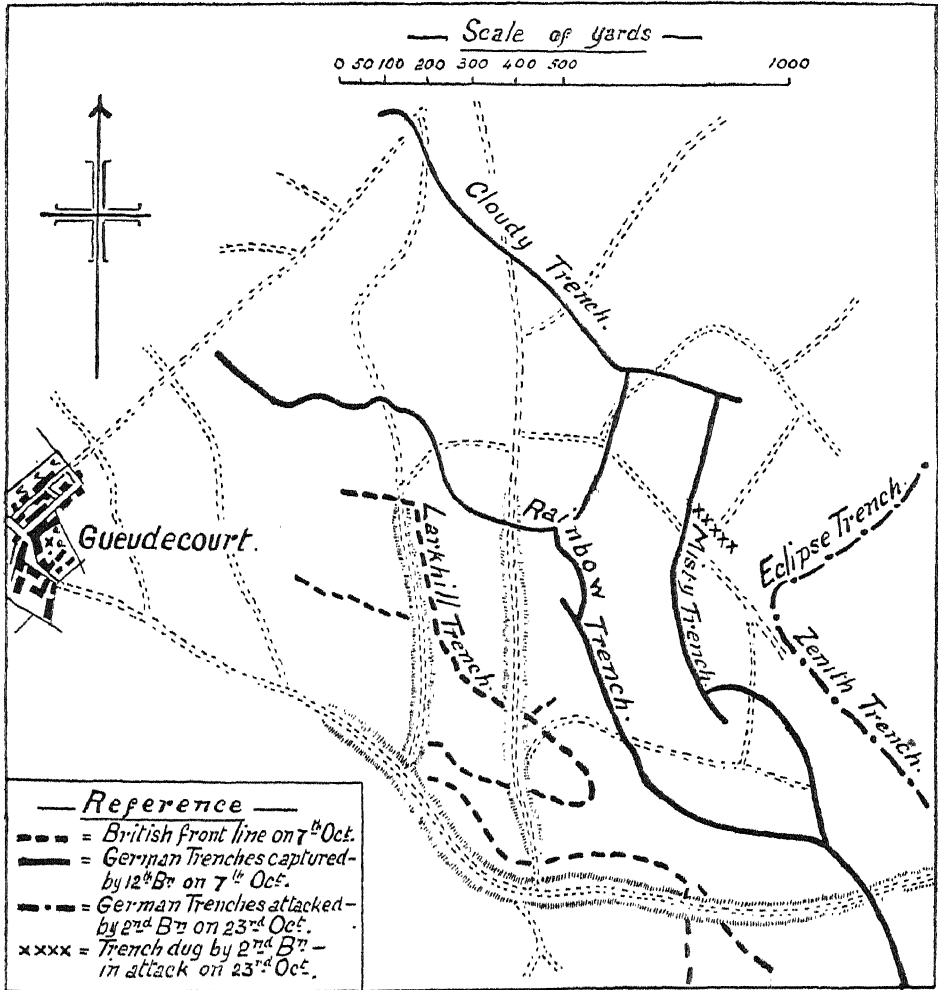
At 1.45 p.m. the barrage came down and the Riflemen went over. They were seen to be advancing apparently unscathed, as if carrying out a battle practice, until within a few yards of the enemy's wire—for their advance up to that point was defiladed by the contour of the ground. Suddenly the line was seen to check in confusion and surge this way and that, the men dropping right and left. They had come at the same moment against imperfectly cut wire and the enemy's machine guns. All five officers in the two leading companies went down—four killed and the fifth severely wounded. The casualties among the men were severe. Nor were the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry in any better plight. But the supporting companies came up behind ; the line steadied again and poured forward into Rainbow Trench. Most of the garrison hurriedly surrendered. Many fled back toward Cloudy Trench. Some, including a machine-gun team, put up a resistance and were killed. The 61st Brigade

on the left and the 6th Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry on the right were well up in line ; and the first objective was then secured. " C " and " D " Companies of the Twelfth Battalion at once pushed forward to take up their position for the advance to the second objective.

Twenty minutes after zero—at 2.5 p.m. the barrage lifted and they charged Cloudy Trench. The enemy attempted a half-hearted defence with bombs, but by 2.15 all was over. The trench—it was very incomplete—had been captured. Most of the garrison had been killed. There were a few prisoners, augmented later by some who were cowering under the dead at the bottom of the trench. A small number ran away, of whom the majority were shot down as they ran. The troops on the right were also on their objective ; and the whole line set to work to dig in—a necessary precaution ; for beyond the Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry on the right the attack of the 56th Division had been broken by enfilade fire from Sailly-Saillisel ; and the 13th Division on the left in the XV Corps had fared little better. The two Brigades of the 20th (Light) Division were out in a salient of their own making, and the flanks of the Division were in the air. Moreover there was a gap between the Twelfth Battalion (60th Brigade) and the 7th K.O.Y.L.I. due to the casualties both had suffered. A company of the Somersets was sent up to fill this and troops were posted on either flank of the Division—a working party two hundred strong from the Eleventh Battalion being given the additional rôle of watching the left flank in conjunction with a company of the 6th Bn. Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. At 5 p.m. a strong force of the enemy debouched from Beaulencourt, on the front of the Twelfth Battalion, in four lines in extended order. At one thousand two hundred yards the Riflemen engaged them with Lewis guns and rifles, thickened by the attached section of the 60th Machine Gun Company. The effect of the fire was instantaneous and reassuring. The advance broke up and scattered, and the few who courageously tried to press on were caught in the stationary barrage and dispersed. Other counter-attacks developed elsewhere and were as easily shattered. The positions gained were consolidated during the night by the troops that had taken them, reinforced by other units from the Division. During the next morning the enemy artillery was active but the bulk of his shells fell into the line that his own troops had dug diagonally across the front of the Rifle Brigade, with the result that after fruitless rocket signals the remnant of the garrison (some twenty-five in number) fled from their post over the open and were hotly engaged by the Riflemen in their flight. The Twelfth Battalion line was handed over to the York and Lancaster Regiment early that night on relief of the 20th Division by the 6th Division. The casualties of the Twelfth

GUEUDECOURT.

October, 1916.



THE TWELFTH BATTALION ATTACK ON RAINBOW TRENCH (7th October)
AND
THE SECOND BATTALION ATTACK ON ZENITH AND ECLIPSE TRENCHES (23rd October).

Battalion had been severe—five officers killed and died of wounds ; three wounded ; and two hundred and twenty-three other ranks killed, wounded and missing. But they had the satisfaction of knowing that with the three other battalions of the 20th Division they were the only troops in the Fourth Army that took all their objectives on that day.

The 20th (Light) Division was now due for a rest. But before it went back to the pleasant old-world villages along the Somme between Amiens and Abbeville, Lord Cavan paid it a visit to say that it was to return to the XIV Corps. "I have come," he said, "to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the magnificent work you have done for the Army and for the Corps. The capture of Guillemont was chiefly due to *you*," turning to the Greenjacket Brigade. And then, having thanked the 61st Brigade for their work with the Guards Division and both that Brigade and the 60th Brigade for the success of October 7th—"I have asked the Army Commander and the Commander-in-Chief not to take away the 20th Division," he added. "I would not lose the 20th Division for crowns and crowns." *

During the remainder of October it may almost be said to have rained without intermission. But the struggle was grimly maintained. To some extent the blows that followed in quick succession on the 12th, 18th and 23rd must be regarded much as the struggles of a man who, having waded into a bog, is plunging and floundering to clamber out on firm ground beyond. The French had a definite tactical objective in the high ground of Sailly-Saillisel which enfiladed the British line, but when that had been gained the Allies can hardly have expected to progress much further. The Tanks were already useless on the treacherous ground. The men employed in the assault stumbled exhausted into their assembly positions, and at zero slithered and slipped, staggering under the weight of their equipment, through sludge and water in their effort to keep up with the barrage. The dash of the battles of September was irrecoverably gone. But the winter was approaching fast ; and it seemed to be worth almost any sacrifice to get out of that awful mud before it came. Let but the Fourth Army come to within striking distance of the Le Transloy line (as it came to be known) and they would break through once again on a wide front and find themselves in open country. What perhaps was insufficiently appreciated was that, in the existing conditions of warfare, the open country was a mirage, that with each successive advance must inevitably recede farther and farther away. By virtue of the contending artilleries they took their mud with them. Unless there could be a break through of such depth as to

* *The History of the 20th (Light) Division*, page 107.

penetrate beyond the shelled area, there could be no escape from it. And unless the enemy could be kept on the run there was equally no escape ; for directly the line halted the mutual bombardment would be resumed and the mud would reappear. Meanwhile however the immediate problem was to get within striking distance of the Le Transloy line.

Why, it may be asked, advert to this aspect of the Somme battle ? In justice to the troops. The 4th and 8th Divisions contained the regular battalions of many of the finest regiments in the British Army. Both of these divisions had been shattered in the battle of July 1st. Both however retained a leavening of officers and N.C.O.'s schooled, in the 4th Division, at Le Cateau and the Marne and the two Battles of Ypres, and in the 8th Division, at Neuve Chapelle and Fromelles and Le Bridoux. They were reinforced by picked men from the Reserve battalions. The units were commanded by the cream of the Regular Army. In the light of all the experience gained in the great offensive they were intensively trained to resume it. And they returned, after the triumphs of the Service Divisions, to failure once again. In the tasks that they were asked to perform no human beings could have succeeded. That they achieved what little they did is proof enough of their gallantry and quality as soldiers.

The
First Battalion
returns to
The Somme.
Frosty Trench.

The 4th Division came into the XIV Corps immediately after the action of October 7th, and the 10th and 12th Brigades were engaged on October 12th when the Corps supported a further attempt by the French to take Sailly-Saillisel. The Division had relieved the 56th

Division, coming in on the extreme right of the Fourth Army. The French broke into the village of Sailly-Saillisel ; but, on the Fourth Army front little or no progress was made ; and on the 16th the 11th Brigade moved up from Montauban to renew the attack on October 18th, in conjunction with the French operations to complete the capture of the village. The assault was to be delivered by the First Battalion (in touch with the 32nd French Infantry Regt.) on the right, and the 1st Bn. East Lancashire Regt. on the left. On the night of the 17th, the Battalion relieved the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers (11th Brigade) and assembled in a variety of odds and ends of trench, mostly unconnected. " It was a terrible night of pouring rain and pitch darkness, and the relief took a long time."

The position that the Battalion had taken over was east of Lesbœufs, on the northern slopes of the Morval spur, astride the Morval-Le Transloy road, of which, however by now, no visible trace remained. The failure, in this locality, of the attempt to advance on October 7th was said to

have been due, in part, to the flanking fire from Sailly-Saillisel. Since that date most of Sailly-Saillisel had passed into the hands of the French ; and the attack of the 4th Division was more directed to containing the enemy on the Divisional front in order to help the movement of the French, than to penetrating the defences to any depth. The objective allotted to the 11th Brigade formed a continuation of the line captured by the Twelfth Battalion on the 7th of the month and consisted of the sections of trench known as Rainy, Dewdrop, Frosty and Hazy Trenches, whose capture would represent an advance of some three to five hundred yards.

The 11th Brigade plan was to attack on a front of two Battalions, with the First Battalion on the right and the East Lancashire Regiment on the left. Colonel Fellowes in his turn decided that the First Battalion should attack in three parties which, for convenience, may be described as " B," " C," and " I " Companies, though in reality " A " Company was included—the officers and men being divided up between " B " and " I." The dispositions were as follows. " C " Company (Lieutenant Boughton Knight) on the right, was drawn up in Warwick Trench and Andrews Post (the latter some two hundred yards in rear of the former). " I " Company (Captain Gracey) together with forty men of " A " Company assembled for the centre attack in German Trench and Muggy Trench, some four hundred yards in rear of Andrews Post. " B " Company (Captain R. C. Beech) together with eighty men of " A " Company under 2nd Lieutenant R. W. Holmes-à-Court and 2nd Lieutenant A. S. S. Herbert was on the left in Foggy Trench—the prolongation to the north of Muggy Trench. " H " Company 1st Bn. Somerset Light Infantry, lent for the purpose, was in Shamrock Trench which ran along the sunken road that formed the eastern boundary of Lesbœufs. The objectives of the attack were so allotted that " C " Company on the right should take Frosty Trench, and " I " Company advancing through " C " should capture Hazy Trench a hundred yards beyond, whilst " B " Company on the left captured the gunpits and strong points three hundred yards to their front, and pushed on to the line of Hazy Trench, in touch with " I " Company on the right and the East Lancashire Regiment on the left. A tank was put at the disposal of Colonel Fellowes, but, as it stuck in a sunken road between Lesbœufs and Morval, was of no account in the battle. Each party had three Lewis guns and a strong force of bombers with twelve bombs apiece. In addition a large supply of " P " bombs were taken by " B " and " C " Companies to deal with the dug-outs in the gunpits and those suspected in Frosty Trench. " C " Company was in addition reinforced by a Vickers-gun section from the machine-gun company ; and it was intended that two Stokes mortars should be employed in Warwick Trench to assist the attack, but these did

not arrive in time for employment. In anticipation of the difficulty of keeping direction in a night attack, over that entirely featureless country, pointers and tapes were laid out and compass bearings were taken.

Zero hour was 3.40 a.m., more than an hour before daylight would break on this October morning. The night was pitch black and further obscured by drizzling rain. And, as if the ground and blackness were not in themselves perplexing enough, a company of the East Lancashire Regiment, intended for assembly on the left of "B" Company, were discovered on the right of that company at 3 a.m. and moved in file across "B" Company's front along the line of Foggy and Burnaby Trenches. The flares of a German sniper revealed this movement which was followed by a discharge of red rockets from the enemy's front line, an artillery warning signal. And when the barrage fell at 3.40, it was answered within a few seconds by an enemy barrage of shrapnel and high explosives that swept No-man's-land and the front line.

The results of the attack were curiously mixed. On the right, "C" Company was unable to come within twenty yards of Frosty Trench which was strongly defended by one or more machine guns that opened directly the barrage fell and continued firing throughout. Lieutenant Boughton Knight was killed, his subaltern 2nd Lieutenant Younghusband was wounded, and there were fifty-seven casualties amongst the men. The French of the 32nd Infantry Regiment, on the right of "C" Company, were also held up by machine-gun fire, so that in that quarter that attack may be said to have failed completely. In the centre, "I" Company lost direction at once, as from their position at the apex of a tiny re-entrant was almost inevitable, and, instead of passing over Andrews Post and Warwick Trench and following behind "C" Company to Frosty Trench in readiness to go through to the battalion objective, struck out half-left toward the gunpits on "B" Company's front, and eventually reached the outlying shell-hole defences that flanked the gunpits position. Here they disposed of a German outpost of three men and pushed on, bearing to the right, until they reached an embankment and a sunken lane. Probably by this time they were behind Frosty Trench and in the neighbourhood of Hazy Trench, but by now the darkness and the mud had done their work thoroughly, and no one in the entire company had the faintest notion of his whereabouts. Both officers were missing; and the company was thoroughly disorganized. But they plunged on in the direction of the sounds of fighting; and it seems that, in their bewilderment, they must somehow have worked round in a semicircle to the left, the traditional tendency of a blindfolded man. For they came across a line of shell holes; charged them, taking twenty prisoners; pushed on to a strip of

trench beyond which they rushed and destroyed a machine gun ; captured another machine gun in an adjacent shell hole ; passing still forward found themselves in the gunpits ; captured these after a hand-to-hand struggle ; and, pushing on as they supposed to the battalion objective, reached the East Lancashire trenches on the left of " B " Company, having lost Captain Gracey, 2nd Lieutenant Blackie and one hundred men. In these exploits a leading part was taken by A/Corporal Jackson and Rifleman Clayton, both of whom were awarded the D.C.M.

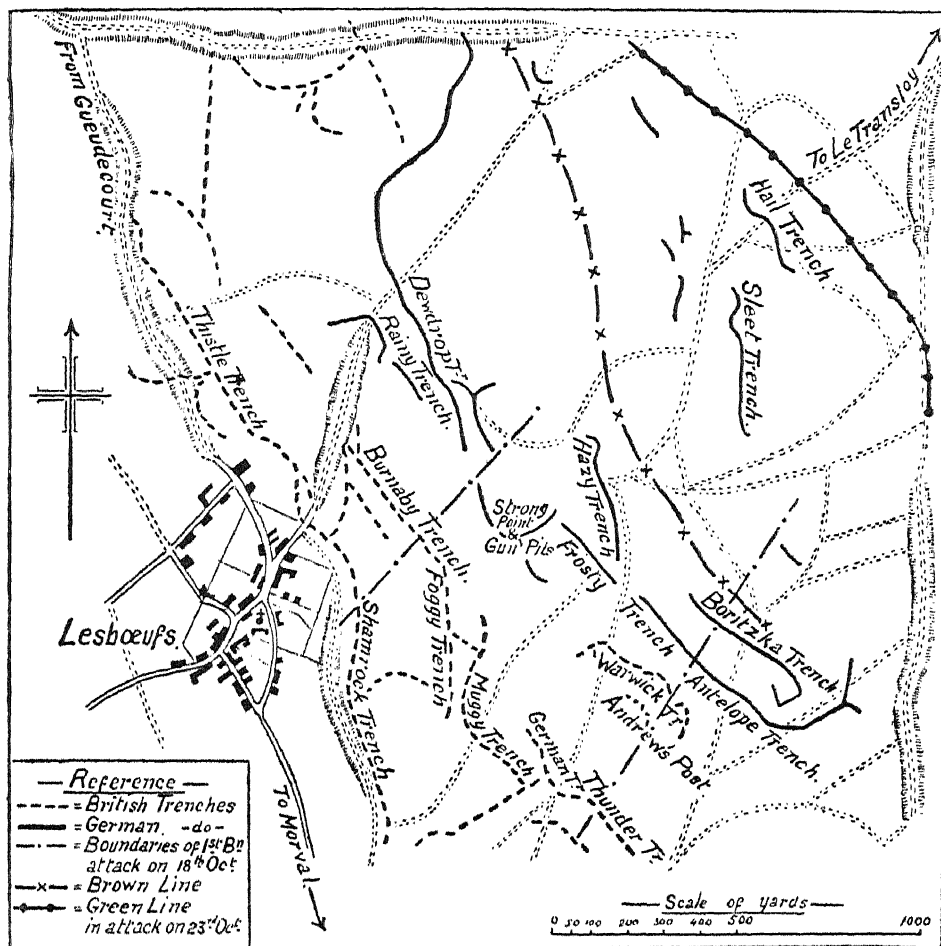
Meanwhile " B " Company, with the bulk of " A " Company attached, had attacked the gunpits frontally. The party was caught in the German counter-barrage in crossing No-man's-land, suffered a number of casualties and, which was even more serious in a night attack, became disorganized by the fire—a disorganization considerably increased by the hail of machine-gun bullets that greeted it as it approached the shell holes in front of the gunpits. A detachment succeeded in penetrating to the gunpits and then disappeared. The force attached from " A " Company moved on the right of " B " and came under particularly heavy machine-gun fire from behind the gunpits—very probably from the shell-hole positions in rear of the pits that were later captured by " I " Company. A party of twelve under Company Sergeant-Major Sawyer * succeeded in reaching and entering one of the strong points ; but, as there was no sign of reinforcements and the enemy mustered thickly to counter-attack, this party fell back. Captain R. C. Beech of " B " Company was killed and forty-four of his men became casualties. Both officers of " A " Company were wounded but Lieutenant Holmes-à-Court remained at duty. " A " Company's losses amounted to thirty-nine. The Battalion casualties were thus eight officers † and two hundred and fifty men. At about half-past two in the morning Colonel Fellowes was ordered to renew the attack, in co-operation with the French, at 11.45 a.m. For this purpose " A " Company 1st Bn. Somerset Light Infantry was lent to the First Battalion. Orders were sent by runner to " C " Company and were, in addition, telephoned to the liaison officer with the French 32nd Regiment by whom they were telephoned direct to the French front line. Neither message reached " C " Company before 1 p.m. But, in fact, no advance was made by the French, perhaps because they were out of touch with the Rifle Brigade and unable to find out what was taking place on their left. At 4 p.m. a stretcher-bearer reported that a party of twenty-five of " I " Company under Sergeant Bates was holding out in Frosty Trench. At this time the real whereabouts of the remnants of " I " Company (in the East Lancashire Regiment line) was still unknown.

* He won the D.C.M. that day.

† 2nd Lieutenant Wilson was wounded at the Battalion Report Centre.

THE ATTACKS ON LE TRANSLOY.

October, 1916.



THE FIRST BATTALION NIGHT ATTACK, 18-19th October,
AND
THE SUBSEQUENT ACTION, 23rd October.

Orders were at once sent to Lieutenant Lole at the advanced report centre to go out to the party in Frosty Trench telling them to hold on till reinforcements could be sent up. At dusk he set out with a patrol only to find Frosty Trench occupied by a party of the enemy who fled at his approach. The trench was seized and garrisoned with a Lewis-gun post. Had the original attack been carried out in circumstances that permitted of the Riflemen finding their way to their objectives it cannot be questioned that they would have easily taken them. A counter-attack by the enemy on Frosty Trench at about 9 p.m. was beaten off by the garrison ; and the trench was that night consolidated and incorporated in the British front line. The Battalion was relieved on the night of the 19th by the Somersets. "The weather had been appalling the whole time, and the state of the trenches beyond words."

The general results of the XIV Corps operations of October 18th were not great. The French completed their capture of Sailly-Saillisel. Elsewhere no progress was achieved. But with Sailly-Saillisel secure it was possible to undertake the larger operation of advancing to the outskirts of Le Transloy ; and accordingly orders were issued by Fourth Army for the resumption of the attack. In this operation the 4th Division continued to work on the left of the French ; and the 8th Division, brought down from Lillers on the 15th of the month by rail and motor-bus to Ville-sur-Ancre, whence it marched to Trônes Wood and Montauban, came into the XIV Corps line on the left of the 4th Division. The 25th Brigade went into the line on the 19th October, the Second Battalion relieving the 7th Bn. The Buffs, of the 6th Division, east of Lesbœufs. Rain fell practically throughout the entire day. By the 21st, however, the ground permitted the carrying out of a successful operation by the Reserve Army to extend the gains on the Thiepval spur. And on the 23rd the Fourth Army once more attacked side by side with the French.

**The
First and Second
Battalions Attack.**

In the attack of the 4th Division the First Battalion was in support to the 1st Bn. Hampshire Regt. attacking next to the French. The left attack of the 11th Brigade was to be carried out by the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers supported by the 1st Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regt. The objectives of the attack were two—first, a "Brown Line," an arbitrary line across the map that took in the objective of the previous attack (Hazy Trench, the gunpits, etc.) ; second, a "Green Line," that ran for a couple of hundred yards north along the sunken Haie Wood-Le Transloy road, then across from that road to the Le Transloy-Morval road. The taking of this objective involved the capture of the isolated defences known as

Sleet and Hail Trenches and would bring the Fourth Army within five hundred yards of the main Le Transloy line. The task of the support battalion was to pass through the Hampshires and Dublins on the Brown Line and capture the Green Line. They were however warned to be in readiness to go to the assistance of the attacking battalions if those units should be held up before reaching the first objective. The Hampshires were to assemble in the advanced trenches used by the First Battalion on the 18th; and the Rifle Brigade were allotted German Trench, Muggy Trench and part of Shamrock Trench in rear of them. At zero the leading battalions would advance, followed ten minutes later by the supports. The attack of the support battalion on the second objective was timed to leave the Brown Line at zero plus thirty minutes. "The attack," said the order of the Army Commander, "will be pushed with the greatest resolution."

In the attack of the 8th Division, the rôle of the Second Battalion was that of left attacking battalion in the centre brigade sector. The objective of the Division was to be gained in two bounds, but as they can only be described by map references it is sufficient to say that like those of the 4th Division on the right they were designed to bring the British line within striking distance of the Le Transloy system. On the right of the 25th Brigade was the 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. The 23rd Brigade attacked on the right, and the 24th on the left.

On the 22nd of October the First Battalion moved up from Guillemont where it had been bivouacking in shell holes rudely covered in with corrugated iron and sandbags. Since the 19th reorganization had been hurriedly carried out, but the companies were much below strength and only eleven officers could be mustered. On arriving in the forward area the Battalion took over its assembly trenches with "C" Company (2nd Lieutenant Greenfield) on the right, "A" Company (Captain S. S. Jenkyns) on the left, "B" Company (2nd Lieutenant Taylor) which was to provide the "moppers up" in Muggy Trench, and "I" Company (2nd Lieutenant Norris) in support. Colonel Fellowes and the Adjutant, Lieutenant G. Jackson, established Headquarters in the sunken Lesbœufs-Morval road, in readiness to move forward to German Trench if the advance should be successful. An advanced report centre was made in German Trench.

Zero was half-past two in the afternoon. At twenty minutes to three the First Battalion left its assembly trenches in four waves and advanced in support of the Hampshire Regiment. Indirect machine-gun fire had been directed on the supports; and the enemy barrage had fallen along the Morval-Lesbœufs sunken road; the casualties however were remarkably

few and for a quarter of a mile the advance went "strongly and well." This brought the Battalion clear of the old British front line into No-man's-land, and here it mounted a low ridge and came under a tempest of machine-gun fire "knee high, or just skimming the top of the ridge." The Hampshires were seen to be held up in front of Boritzka Trench (the German front line in the right sector of the attack). The leading companies "A" and "C" went on, as they had been warned to do in such a contingency, to reinforce the firing line. "B" Company began to dig in some twenty yards in rear of Frosty Trench. "I" Company halted in the old British front line. On the right "C" Company found itself amidst the third wave of the Hampshire Regiment. The leading wave of the Hampshires could not be seen; but, by working forward from shell hole to shell hole, rather less than half of "C" Company succeeded in reaching Boritzka Trench, where they joined a similar party of the Hampshires. This mixed force, which was not in touch with any other unit, was eventually driven out by bombing attacks from both flanks, covered by machine-gun fire. At 3.45, learning of the situation, the commanding officer sent orders directing "B" Company to push forward in support of "A" and "C," engaging the machine guns with rifle and Lewis-gun fire. But the deficiencies in Lewis guns occasioned by the losses on the 18th had not yet been made good. Two guns had been borrowed from the 21st Bn. West Yorkshires but even then the Battalion was three under establishment. Of the five guns in the Battalion "B" Company had only one. And the bulk of "A" Company with the remnants of "C" Company were now in Frosty Trench immediately in front of "B" Company. To "I" Company orders were sent that every endeavour must be made to push on. But no progress in fact was possible. Darkness fell early, and was of such impenetrable obscurity that difficulty was found in locating the position of the troops. By midnight, however, the dispositions of the Battalion were found to be: one officer and fifty men of "I" Company in Antelope Trench; and three officers (one wounded) and one hundred men of the remaining three companies in Frosty Trench. These last were engaged in digging a trench to join up with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who had captured the gunpits but had likewise failed to make further progress. Second Lieutenants D. S. Lawrence and R. W. Greenfield were killed. Captain S. S. Jenkyns, 2nd Lieutenant G. A. Robson and 2nd Lieutenant Baggallay were wounded, and one hundred and seventeen other ranks were killed, wounded and missing. The Battalion was relieved on the following night by the 2nd Bn. Royal Welch Fusiliers.

The attack of the 8th Division had met with hardly more success. The attacking units of the 23rd Brigade were held up on the right, but eventually

succeeded in passing the first objective and digging in about one hundred yards beyond it. The attack of the 24th Brigade succeeded on the left, but elsewhere had great difficulty from the enemy strong points. The centre attack, of the 25th Brigade, suffered severely. The Lincolnshire Regiment were completely shattered by rifle fire personally controlled by a gallant enemy who sprang out of Zenith Trench in spite of the creeping barrage, called up his men on the fire-step, and shot down the leading waves as they advanced. This had serious consequences for the Rifle Brigade advancing on the left of the Lincolns. "A" and "B" Companies led the attack, with "C" and part of "D" following behind them. But the failure of the right battalion involved also the right platoon of the Rifle Brigade which could make no headway against the strong point at the junction of the Zenith and Eclipse Trenches. The supports coming up were no luckier. Captain H. W. Simpson was killed in endeavouring to capture this important trench junction. Meanwhile "A" and "B" Companies had established themselves in a line of shell holes, where they were joined by the remnants of "C" and "D" Companies. During the night an astonishing event took place which is best described in the words of Colonel Brand.

"Having established ourselves in a line of shell holes in advance of our line, an officer's patrol was sent out and shortly afterwards the officer sent back three Germans, one of whom spoke English. He told me that they had lost their way and had fallen in with our patrol to whom they had surrendered, and that they belonged to a new Prussian Battalion who had just taken over the front line (this was borne out by their having no mud on their clothing). He stated that there were many more in the Battalion who would surrender, so, much to his disgust, he was sent out again with the officer and a strong patrol. They got to a shell hole close to the German trench, when the prisoner was instructed to get his friends out. He then commenced to call out names such as Fritz, Hans, etc., and within a few minutes out of the trench came Germans calling "Kamerad." However, when about twenty had arrived orders were given in the German trench to open rapid fire. The R.B. officer kept his prisoners in the shell holes until the firing had ceased and then brought them back. This sounds like a fairy story but it's true; and I remember thinking that the war must nearly be over. Presumably, this new Prussian Battalion must have been in a bad state of discipline, quite unlike the troops that had held the trench during our attack the afternoon before. The latter fought most bravely."

Further orders to all the Brigades to renew the attack were unproductive of result. During the evening the troops of the 23rd Brigade on the right

were shelled out of the position they had occupied. At 8.30 p.m. the 25th Brigade was ordered to carry out a further attack to begin at 3.50 a.m. (October 24th). In this the Riflemen were to co-operate from their line of shell holes by attacking the junction of Zenith and Eclipse Trenches. Rain however had fallen continually throughout the previous day and night, with the result that the state of the ground prohibited the troops from keeping pace with the barrage, and the attack failed completely within a few moments of its start. The battalions that had been engaged were relieved in the line that night. The cost to the Second Battalion was Captain H. W. Simpson, Lieutenant H. L. Pollok, 2nd Lieutenant J. R. Greathead, and 2nd Lieutenant J. V. Godwin killed, Captain S. W. Murray, 2nd Lieutenant S. Knowles, 2nd Lieutenant T. W. Graham and 2nd Lieutenant A. J. Brown wounded, and two hundred and thirty other ranks killed, wounded and missing. The 25th Brigade was held in readiness day after day until the 29th to resume the attack, but day after day the rain fell and the attack was, quite literally, washed out.

The results of the battle of October 23rd were meagre to the point of nothingness. But on October 21st profiting by a fine day, General Gough's Reserve Army had made a successful advance on the Thiepval ridge capturing one thousand prisoners. On November 5th another abortive attack was made in conjunction with the French. On the 7th, however, the French advanced their line south of the Somme; and on the 12th another combined attack was launched. Contemporaneously General Gough scored a brilliant success astride of the Ancre, where the ground, though water-logged, was still passable. But on the remainder of the battlefield progress was no longer possible. The Battle of the Somme was abandoned.

●



CAPTAIN H. DANIELS, V.C., M.C.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE. THE FOURTH BATTALION AT SALONIKA. WINTER QUARTERS.

THE Battle of the Ancre 1916, as it has been officially named, was in reality an offshoot of the Battle of the Somme.

On the front of the Fourth Army the possibility of further progress had gradually diminished in the face of the rain and the steadily swelling ocean of mud. But the Fourth Army battlefield had been repeatedly torn up by bombardments of a fury rarely attained on the front of Sir Hubert Gough ; and in addition the bulk of the fighting on the right was now up-hill ; whereas on the greater part of its line the Reserve Army looked down from commanding positions upon an enemy in the water-logged valleys. On November 12th Sir Henry Rawlinson and General Foch made a final effort to emerge from the mud. For some time it had been plain that the task of the Fourth Army was incapable of completion in 1916. The realization of this is revealed in the relatively minor character of the objectives allotted to the attacks of late October and November. But on the Reserve Army front the ground though sodden was not impassable. If a surprise attack could be successfully launched, the way was still open to take the Germans in the flank opposite the Third British Army. Such an operation, moreover, might well succeed, where frontal attacks had failed, in freeing the mud-bound Fourth Army from its unenviable winter on the battlefield, and enabling it to reach the Le Transloy line and even the partly constructed Rocquigny line beyond. About the middle of October the Commander-in-Chief began to shift his troops towards the left of his battle-front ; and, abandoning, or relegating to second place, his idea of going forward side by side with the French, to give his mind to a large plan for breaking through astride the Ancre.

The first step, in order to make this possible, was to complete the capture of the high ground above St. Pierre-Divion and Grandcourt, thus enabling the II Corps south of the Ancre to bring a converging attack to bear upon the villages in the valley, at the same time as the V Corps drove in the defences on the spurs beyond the river. The left of the Fourth Army had reached Le Sars, but could make no progress against the Butte de

Warlencourt, a formidable artificial hillock, tunnelled and fortified and some fifty feet or more in height. From the point of junction of the two Armies, a few hundred yards north-west of Destremont Farm, the Reserve Army line ran almost due west through Stuff and Schwaben Redoubts to the old British front line north of Thiepval Wood. Thence it ran north unchanged since July 1st. The German main line east of St. Pierre-Divion was now Stuff Trench which had formerly connected with the reserve line of the Schwaben Redoubt. Stuff Trench extended as far as Stump Road, a sunken country track running into Grandcourt, from which road Regina Trench, the prolongation of the German front line, ran east towards Le Sars. The capture of these two trenches on the front of II Corps would give the whole of the high ground dominating the valley of the Ancre into the hands of the British. The II Corps, employing the 4th Canadian, 18th, 25th and 39th Divisions, was directed to carry out that operation on October 19th. Rain intervened, and the operation was postponed until the 21st.

The 39th Division, with the Sixteenth Battalion in the 117th Brigade, now held the left sector of the II Corps front. At noon on October 16th the 63rd Royal Naval Division, newly arrived from the Lens area, extended the front of the V Corps as far as the Ancre, relieving the 39th Division in all trenches north of the river. This readjustment gave the 39th Division a front extending from Stuff Redoubt (exclusive) to the river. The front was held by two Brigades. On the right (Redoubt sector) the 116th Brigade held from Stuff Redoubt to Schwaben Redoubt. The left (River) sector was held by the 117th Brigade, the Sixteenth Battalion being in support in the North and South Bluffs until the 20th November when it relieved the 17th Bn. Notts. and Derby Regt. in the centre battalion sector. The attack of the 39th Division was only necessary in the right (Redoubt) sector and only on twelve hundred yards of the Brigade front. But the Divisional orders, having provided for the main attack by the 116th Brigade upon Stuff Trench in conjunction with the 25th Division, directed the 117th Brigade to "seize the opportunity afforded by this attack to make headway by bombing along the trenches on its front." It was intended that this task should be carried out by one company of the Notts and Derby Regiment supported by one company of the Sixteenth Battalion.

Zero was fixed for 12.6 p.m. on October 21st. At 5 a.m. that morning after an intense bombardment the enemy counter-attacked Schwaben Redoubt. The attempt was completely smashed with heavy casualties and a large haul of prisoners by the garrison, the 17th Bn. 60th.* So signal a triumph was an excellent augury for the day.

* This battalion belonged to the 117th Brigade but was under the orders of the 116th Brigade whilst holding the Redoubt.

The main attack, despite the events of the morning, was an unqualified success, achieved, with the capture of more than a thousand prisoners, at a cost of less than one thousand two hundred casualties to the entire II Corps. But the subsidiary attack of the 117th Brigade was developed by the Brigadier into more than a seizure of opportunities for bombing. Parties of the Sherwood Foresters and the Rifle Brigade attacked two posts a couple of hundred yards apart. Both were successfully entered. In the left post (Point 16) the Sixteenth Battalion killed and wounded five of the garrison, and captured eight prisoners and a machine gun with a broken tripod. The post was consolidated and blocks were established in the trenches beyond it. On the right the post (Point 47) was entered and the attacking party pressed on up the trench, endeavouring to make a further fifty yards and gain a second post (Point 38) at a main trench junction. Machine-gun fire and lack of cover made headway impossible; and the party fell back on Point 47, building a protective block. As might have been foreseen, the enemy then vacated Point 38 and directed a heavy bombardment upon that post and Point 47. At 5 p.m. the Brigade Commander reported to the Division that he still held Point 16 and the Pope's Nose (the small adjoining re-entrant) but that his men had been shelled out of Point 47. General Cuthbert, the Divisional Commander, ordered that no further action should be taken.

It is significant to contrast the casualties suffered by the Sixteenth Battalion, in an operation which its Diary described as "highly successful", with the total casualties incurred by the 39th Division on that day, including the successful main attack on Stuff Trench in which a great number of prisoners were taken and heavy losses inflicted on the enemy. In the whole Division there were twenty-eight officers and six hundred and seventy-eight other ranks killed, wounded and missing. Out of that number one officer and one hundred and thirty-seven other ranks (more than one-fifth) were lost by the Sixteenth Battalion in a mere demonstration that can hardly have affected the main attack in any appreciable manner. The Battalion continued to hold the River Central sector until the 23rd, when it was relieved by the 17th Bn. the Notts. and Derby Regt., and moved back to Martinsart, nominally to rest, in reality to supply working parties for the front line. On the 28th it came back to the left sub-sector of the Brigade front, relieving the 17th Bn. Royal Sussex Regt.; but after one night in the trenches handed over to the 1st/6th Cheshire Regt. of the 118th Brigade and returned to Martinsart. Colonel Darrell who, at the beginning of the month, was awarded the D.S.O. for his work on September 3rd, was now invalided to hospital, and was

succeeded in command by Captain W. G. Maxwell, M.C., the Gordon Highlanders.*

Meanwhile the successful gaining of Stuff and Regina Trenches, so important as jumping-off trenches for II Corps, was the signal for the issue of orders, prepared in advance, for an attack as ambitious in objectives as the original attack of July 1st. For this attack the 37th Division, composed of the 63rd, 111th and 112th Brigades—the Thirteenth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel D. E. P. Prideaux-Brune) being in the 111th Brigade—had been taken from the line in the neighbourhood of Lens and brought down to the Doullens area about the middle of October. Here it was placed under orders to be in readiness to move at short notice into V Corps Reserve for employment in the impending attack. On the 21st, warning orders reached it from V Corps, indicating the part the Division was to play. But zero day had no sooner been fixed for October 25th than the weather necessitated a postponement of twenty-four hours. Next day for the same reason it was postponed for two days, and again until November 1st. On November 2nd the continued bad weather so seriously imperilled the chances of success that the whole operation was indefinitely postponed. Sir Hubert Gough was given the II, V and XIII Corps under the title of the Fifth Army and a modified plan was prepared.

Under the new plan, orders for which were issued to Divisions on November 7th, the attack would take place on November 10th and would be directed as follows. The II Corps south of the Ancre, using only the 19th and 39th Divisions, would swing its left forward from the junction of Stuff and Regina Trenches, on Stump Road, to the Mill by the Ancre, capturing St. Pierre-Divion and Hansa Trench—the prolongation south of the Ancre of the Beaucourt defences. The main feature of this operation was to be the attack of the 39th Division on St. Pierre-Divion and Hansa Trench, the task of the 19th Division being confined to advancing its left from Schwaben Redoubt to conform to the movements of its left-hand neighbour. Three tanks were allotted to the 39th Division. The remaining Divisions of the Corps were to be in readiness at a later stage to attack Pys, Irles, Miraumont and Grandcourt. The V Corps operation was an attack by four Divisions (63rd, 51st, 2nd and 3rd) upon an objective that ran from Beaucourt inclusive up the Redan spur for a thousand yards along Beaucourt road, thence due north across the spur along the line of Frankfort and Munich Trenches (just west of the Beaucourt-Serre road) across Ten Tree alley (the country track running east from the Serre-Mailly-Maillet road) around the outskirts of Serre and back to John Copse. The XIII Corps on the left of V Corps was to attack north and capture

* Who vacated the post of Brigade Major 117th Brigade to take the appointment.

a small star-shaped objective of trenches between Chasseurs Hedge and a point on the road about 700 yards east of John Copse.

The attack on the original objectives for October 25th would be resumed by the whole Fifth Army on "Z + 2 day",* weather permitting. The weather showed no indication of permitting, for it followed up the issue of these orders in a manner so threatening that on the 8th the operation was once again postponed indefinitely. But on the 9th the Commander-in-Chief and Sir Hubert Gough decided to be intimidated no longer by the elements, and the attack was finally fixed for November 13th. The rôle of the 37th Division in the new plan was as yet undetermined. On the 12th, however, it was moved forward from Doullens, the 111th Brigade occupying the villages of Varennes and Hédauville.

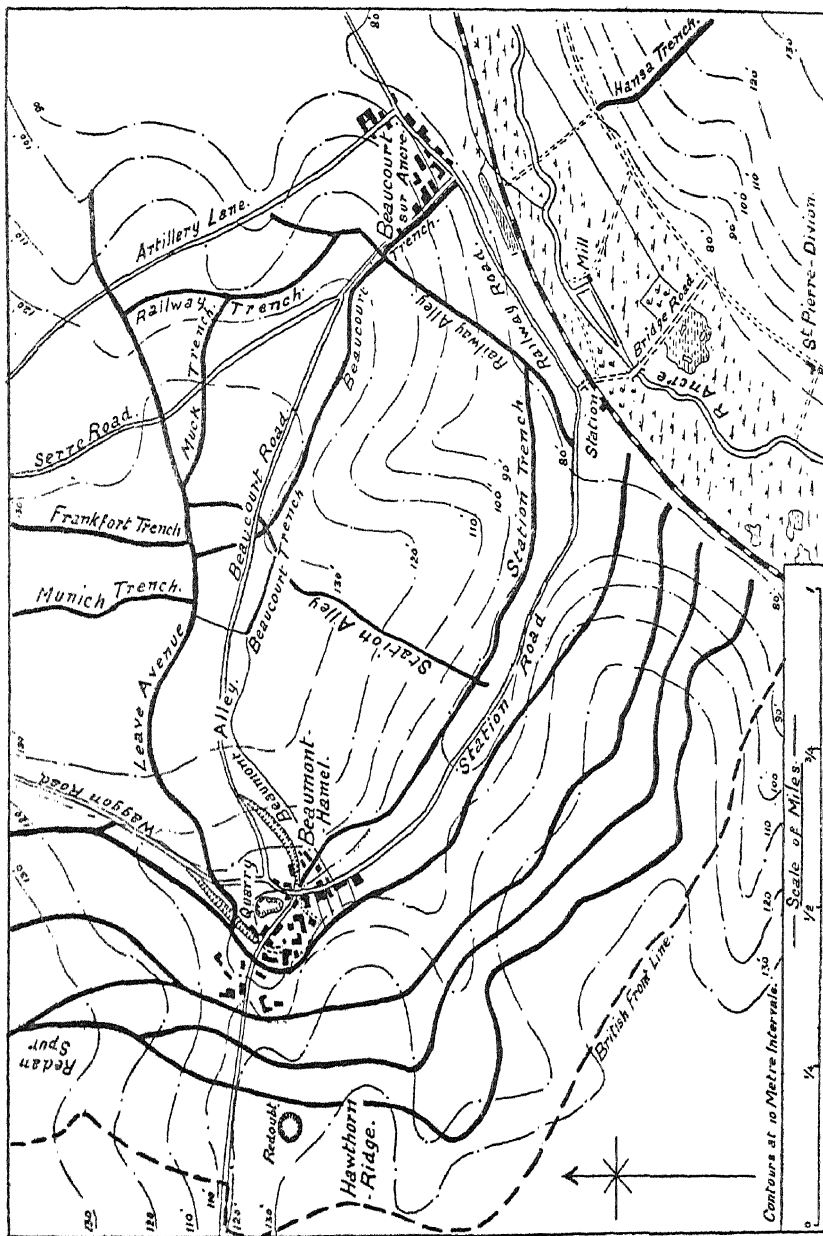
Next morning the battle began. The II Corps attack south of the river was entirely successful, the 39th Division gaining all its objectives with so little loss that the Sixteenth Battalion, waiting in Thiepval in support to the attack, was not called upon to fight. That night the 19th Division took over the 39th Division's new front line, and the 39th Division with the Sixteenth Battalion left the Somme for the Ypres Salient. North of the Ancre, in the V Corps, the success was not so uniform. The day had broken with just such a dense river fog as was to betray the Fifth Army in March two years later. The troops leaving their assembly trenches vanished like wraiths in a mist. The tanks were withdrawn by the Corps and sent back to their camp. On the front of the 39th Division, as we have seen, the fog helped the attacking troops who swooped out of it upon the enemy before he could put up a resistance. On the front of the 63rd Naval Division, however, there was a strong point in the intermediate Green line (Station Road, running from Beaumont-Hamel to Beaucourt Station) that had been imperfectly registered by the heavies and that survived undamaged. From this point machine-gun fire seriously hampered the attack on the left, and from the same neighbourhood the attack of the 51st Division was held up. The configuration of the spurs and valleys over which the 63rd Division attacked was such as in any case might have been expected to bias the attack towards the right; and the Division was entirely new to offensive warfare—a factor that the Divisional Commander, General Shute, late of the 59th Greenjacket Brigade, had endeavoured to correct by repeated conferences (at which his plans were explained in detail by himself to the Battalion Commanders) and by addresses to the

* "Z day" is the conventional military term for the day on which a series of operations related to each other are to begin. Z + 1 day is the following day and Z + 2 day the day after that.

rank and file of the attacking brigades before the battle. Despite every precaution and the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel B. C. Freyberg, V.C., of the Hood Battalion, the attack tended to slip sideways off the spur across which it had to be made, leaving the left of the Division uncovered and out of touch with the troops beyond. Two Battalions of the 11th Brigade—the Thirteenth Battalion Rifle Brigade and the 13th Bn. 60th—had been sent forward to Englebelmer (63rd Division Headquarters) that morning in readiness to be used, with Corps authority. Before the morning was far advanced, General Shute was asking the Corps whether these battalions might be sent forward and whether a tank might not come up and deal with the strong point in Station Road. The tanks had already been sent back and were unavailable ; but during the afternoon the whole of the 11th Brigade was placed at his disposal, and General Barnes the Brigadier took instructions as to its disposal. The 13th Bn. 60th was sent to reinforce the 189th Brigade which had pushed forward on the right to the neighbourhood of Beaucourt ; the Thirteenth Battalion and the 13th Bn. Royal Fusiliers were sent to Station Road to fill the gap and continue the attack ; and the 10th Bn. Royal Fusiliers was held in reserve in the old British front line. By 3.15 p.m. on the 13th, the Thirteenth Battalion had received its orders and Colonel Prideaux-Brune was taking it forward through Hamel to the Green line. After passing through a heavy hostile barrage that wounded two officers and forty other ranks, the Green line was reached at midnight. At 3 a.m. on the 14th the remaining units of the Brigade were in position, and at 4 a.m. orders were received to resume the attack at 6 a.m. Beyond the 51st Division, the 2nd Division had made some progress. It was reinforced from the 112th Brigade of the 37th Division. The 3rd Division opposite Serre was back in its own trenches. Serre once more had completely broken the attack.

The objective of the assault of the 14th was Beaucourt Trench which ran along the western edge of the Beaucourt-Beaumont-Hamel road on ground that rose up the Redan spur from right to left. The attack was to be made by the H.A.C. (of the 189th Brigade), the Thirteenth Battalion Rifle Brigade and the 13th Bn. Royal Fusiliers from right to left—the objective of the Rifle Brigade being four hundred yards of Beaucourt Trench, north-west from the junction with Railway Alley which was a former communication trench running back fully a mile from the railway station to Artillery Lane, the country track that gives access to Beaucourt village from the north. The 13th Bn. Royal Fusiliers was to capture the prolongation of the trench as far as Station Alley, a similar communication trench parallel to Railway Alley and some eight hundred yards distant from it. Beyond this objective the battalions were to advance to Muck

THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE.
14th November, 1916.



THE ATTACK OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION.

Trench, astride the Beaucourt-Serre road, capturing the remainder of Railway Trench on the right as far as Leave Avenue.

The attack began inauspiciously. The barrage was inaccurate, and heavy machine-gun fire held up the troops from 6.10 a.m. until 7.30 p.m. A second barrage was then put down; the 13th Bn. 60th came up on the right; and the advance was successfully recommenced. But the combination of delay, machine-gun fire and the slope of the ground caused the 13th Bn. Royal Fusiliers to lose direction, with the result that they appeared on the right of the Rifle Brigade on the objective, thus leaving the left flank entirely unprotected. The 13th Bn. 60th on the extreme right pushed on into the village of Beaucourt accompanied by some of the Rifle Brigade. Between them the village was captured with a number of prisoners. An attempt was made to push on to Muck Trench but the state of the ground and the heavy machine-gun fire forbade it. The line of Beaucourt Trench was therefore consolidated and "D" Company of the Thirteenth Battalion, with a view to protecting the flank of the Division, began bombing up Beaucourt Trench which was still strongly held by the enemy. The progress was slow but satisfactory. By midnight a further three hundred yards had been gained; and by 4 p.m. on the following afternoon Station Alley had been reached. But as yet no touch could be found with the flank Division.

In fact the 51st Division, though it had secured Beaumont-Hamel, was still behind the Royal Naval Division; and the 2nd Division, although reinforced by the remainder of the 112th Brigade, was unable to eject the enemy from Frankfort Trench, enfiladed as it was from Munich Trench and from Serre behind. During the night patrols, from the Thirteenth Battalion, and from the 8th Bn. Lincolnshire Regt. of the 63rd Brigade (which had come in to relieve the 189th Brigade), pushed out to the second objective of the day's attack—Muck Trench and Railway Trench. Both were found to be untenanted and untenantable, swamped in mud and water and so fallen in as to be virtually non-existent.

The Corps Commander decided to modify his plan. He did not propose to renew the attack on Serre; but considered that, possessing so much of the Redan spur as he now did, he ought to consolidate the whole of it. The Royal Naval Division was withdrawn, giving place to the 37th Division, most of whose troops were already in the line. The relatively fresh 32nd Division was put in to relieve with the 51st and 2nd Divisions.* The 2nd Division was directed to renew the attack on Frankfort Trench as the main operation; and the 37th Division was called upon

* Such shortening of the line as had taken place already, almost squeezed out the 51st Division.

to establish itself from the Ancre, just north of Grandcourt, round the Bois d'Hollande and back across the Puisieux road to where Muck Trench joined Leave Avenue. This operation of the 37th Division was in conjunction with the advance of the II Corps south of the river from Hansa Trench to Grandcourt (19th Division). In preparation for the battle which was to be given on November 18th, the Thirteenth Battalion was relieved on the 15th and went back to bivouac at Englebelmer. It had suffered considerable casualties in its successful attack—two officers killed, ten wounded and three hundred and twelve other ranks killed, wounded and missing.

The battle of November 18th was only a partial success. The centre of the Army reached its objectives, but the flanks failed. In the II Corps, the right of the 19th Division was held up by a strong point in Lucky Way and could make no progress whatever. The left of the Division, however, reached the western outskirts of Grandcourt where touch was established with the 37th Division before 10 a.m. Similarly the right of the 37th Division, despite considerable delay in the transmission of orders, was able to reach Puisieux Trench; and the line was advanced a little in the centre. But on the left no advance was made by the 111th Brigade, for the main attack on Frankfort trench broke down completely. Next day, by order of the Fifth Army, the II Corps line in the neighbourhood of Grandcourt was withdrawn, and the hold on Puisieux abandoned. Further attempts to renew the offensive failed. The fighting of the preceding week had made the ground as impassable as that of the Somme. On the 26th of the month the 37th Division handed over to the 7th Division and moved back to its former area near Doullens—the Thirteenth Battalion returning to its old billets in Puchevillers. The rigours of the winter campaign descended everywhere on the battlefield. The "push" was at an end.

In the fighting which had taken place the British Army had been through the heaviest and most prolonged battle in its history. The casualties of the Somme reached the stupendous figure of four hundred and ten thousand. To these the battalions of the Rifle Brigade contributed heavily. All the battalions had been engaged more than once. In at least two stages of the battle, September 3rd and September 15th, the leading rôle had fallen upon the Greenjackets. In no case had the battalions engaged failed to win the warmest commendation of the Commanders under whom they served, and to prove by the harvest of decorations their dash and stubbornness as fighters. The officers, whose utter disregard of danger is revealed by the severity of their losses and the high proportion of killed to wounded, were in every way worthy of men who only asked to be led to achieve

conspicuous successes—and who, at a pinch, as they proved on numerous occasions, were capable, when their officers and N.C.O.'s were killed, of providing excellent leadership from their own ranks. The non-commissioned officers showed themselves throughout to be made of the qualities that have given its reputation to the Regiment: coolness, discipline, and resource; intelligence in the comprehension of orders; and skill in carrying them out. If any particular exploits, where all were great, should be selected for special mention, those of the Third Battalion at Guillemont station and of the Twelfth Battalion at Rainbow Trench were perhaps the most meritorious because, in each case, despite uncut wire and failure on a flank, and in the case of the Third Battalion despite the fact that the operation was that most difficult of all things, a limited attack, conspicuous success was achieved. As a model of an attack by time-table and a correct advance under a barrage, the assault of the Tenth and Eleventh Battalions at Guillemont stands out prominently. And for sheer dogged courage in adversity, when everything that could have gone wrong had gone wrong, the attack of the First Battalion on October 18th through darkness, rain and mud, machine-gun and shell fire, is not easy to better.

After the calamity of October 23rd the First Battalion went back with the 4th Division to Hocquincourt for training; and five days later moved to Rambures, there to remain for a month. Drafts of officers and men arrived; and a new battalion was slowly built up. The sergeants met the officers at football and defeated them soundly. Medal ribbons were presented by the Divisional Commander. The "Follies" * played to crowded houses. In short, "we were exceedingly comfortable." The Second Battalion remained in the Gueudecourt sector until October 30th, in readiness to participate in the postponed 25th Brigade attack; on the cancellation of which it moved to the Citadel Camp, where, on November 2nd, it was inspected by H.R.H. the Colonel-in-Chief. The Third Battalion left the Vimy sector on October 25th and settled down two days later at Loos where the 24th Division relieved the 40th Division. This sector was fairly quiet, reliefs being carried out every eight days. The Seventh Battalion went out of the line at Wailly on October 25th and marched via Beaumetz to Sombrin; and the Eighth Battalion at the same time moved via Berneville to Grand Rullecourt. November was spent by both of these Battalions, training in billets. On November 13th Sir Edmund Allenby, the Third Army Commander, inspecting the companies of the Seventh Battalion, highly complimented "C" Company (2nd Lieut. Shaw) on their appearance. On the 22nd the Battalion won the Brigade Commander's prize for the

* 4th Division Concert Party.

" best turn-out " in the Brigade ; on the 28th the Battalion runners won the Brigade Competition ; and on the 30th the Battalion team won the Divisional Runners' Competition. The Ninth Battalion, of which Major F. A. U. Pickering, the Scots Greys, had now been appointed in command, spent November at Beaudricourt and Berneville. The Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions were resting, the Tenth at Saisseval, the Eleventh at Picquigny and the Twelfth at Hangest, all in the Somme back-area. The Thirteenth Battalion after the Battle of the Ancre remained in the forward zone until the 21st November and then, after bivouacking at Englebelmer, marched via Louvencourt to Puchevillers. The Sixteenth Battalion, after supporting the attack of the 39th Division on St. Pierre-Divion, moved, via Beauval and Candas, to the Salient, detraining at Bolleezele. On the 20th November Major E. N. Sneepe, the Norfolk Regiment, assumed command.

The
Fourth Battalion. Throughout the year 1916 the Fourth Battalion, which embarked for Salonika in November 1915, had remained in the Eastern Theatre. The 80th Brigade of which the Battalion formed part, spent the early weeks of January at work on the Salonika defences, moving, towards the end of the month, to the neighbourhood of Stavros, where the work begun by the 10th Division on trench lines extending from the Gulf of Organo to Beschik Lake, was carried on by the 27th Division. Here, the Battalion remained until the end of July, in the sector in which it had relieved the Royal Irish Rifles, steadily improving the defences, cutting trenches and making roads. On August 1st the 80th Brigade moved fifteen miles to Chiazizi, where the Fourth Battalion held the right of the Brigade front at the mouth of the Struma River, on the sea ; that is to say on the extreme right of the line of the European battle-fronts. In this locality the Battalion Scouts, under Lieutenant Miller, co-operating with a patrol of Yeomanry, became engaged with the Bulgars among the hills along the left bank of the Struma. The line was of a quietude undreamt of on the Western Front, even in the Vosges. Thus the fact that the Bulgar artillery shelled the Struma position on September 4th stands out prominently in the even monotony of trenches and malaria. The trenches were only inhabited by night. During the day the troops occupied a gorge among the hills some two miles in rear of the line. Battle casualties were rare. But malaria carried off a large and steadily-maintained percentage of officers and men.

By the beginning of December the period of rest for the battalions and Divisions on the Western Front drew to an end. The First Battalion reluctantly left its comfortable billets in Rambures on the 7th and began

moving forward to the trenches for the winter campaign, via a succession of hutted camps "each of which seemed to be filthier and deeper in mud than the last." Colonel Fellowes in his *Diary* supplies a description of the conditions, the more impressive because of its simplicity. "The back of the front behind the Somme during the winter of 1916-1917 is not likely to be forgotten by those who went through it; for sheer undiluted misery and discomfort it was impossible to beat. We none of us were well and we were seldom warm. One lived and slept and moved in mud. Everything that one touched was muddy and after a time one's mind got into very much the same state." In these uncomfortable and depressing surroundings the men who formed the New Armies, from whom Regular and Service Battalions were now alike recruited, displayed a height of spirits worthy of the men who saw through the winters of 1914 and 1915. Whatever the weather, whatever the state of the road, it was rarely that a battalion marched at ease (whether to or from the trenches) without a catch of song. Sullen looks were rare, and even the mildest insubordination rarer. The relations of officers and men in the battalions of the Rifle Brigade, under the combined spell of regimental tradition and esprit de corps, were something for which a parallel has to be sought in the relationship of the members of a Highland clan.

The First Battalion moved into the line at Rancourt south of Sailly-Saillisel, when the 4th Division took over the right of the XIV Corps. The Battalion held the front line of eight posts with one company only at a time. Such were the rigours of the trenches that twenty-four hours was the limit of a man's endurance; and company reliefs took place nightly. The whole sector was "a dreary waste of mud and shell-holes overflowing with water." The Second Battalion had remained in the Lesbœufs sector until November 19th, when it moved back to Warlus and rested throughout December. From November 11th to 15th it was the right battalion of the British Army, in touch with Colonel Nicloux's 135th Regiment d'Infanterie about half a mile south of the battlefield of October 23rd. The Third Battalion continued during November and December to alternate between the trenches and support or reserve billets in the Loos sector. Towards the end of the year the enemy became more active. Mining was carried out on both sides. During December the 14th (Light) Division returned to the trenches near Arras, relieving the 12th Division in the sector it had vacated on going out to rest. The 41st (Greenjacket) Brigade took over from the 37th Brigade in F Sector—the Eighth Battalion relieving the 6th Bn. Royal West Kent Regiment in the front line in daylight on the 16th, and the Seventh Battalion going into support at Rivièrè, with

garrisons in the Petit Château, Petit Moulin, Wailly, and the Sugar Factory, in readiness to take over the line on the 22nd. The Ninth Battalion on that night moved from Divisional Reserve at Dainville into the line in the right sector, relieving the 5th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks L.I. It remained in the trenches until November 27th. The battalions of the 20th (Light) Division began to move forward with the Division during the third week of November via the Ancre villages of Mericourt-l'Abbé and Méaulte to the Somme Battlefield. The Commander-in-Chief's promise to Lord Cavan had been kept, and they were returning to the XIV Corps. Prior to taking over the line, however, the 59th Brigade was employed in road making under the Chief Engineer of the Corps*—the Eleventh Battalion proceeding to Mansel Camp close by Mametz Wood, on the 23rd November and remaining there until relieved by the Tenth Battalion on the 29th. Early in December the Division went into the line relieving the 29th Division in the left sector of the XIV Corps front. During this tour the 59th (Greenjacket) Brigade was split up between the 60th and 61st Brigades, the Tenth Battalion and the 10th Bn. 60th being attached to the right (61st) Brigade group, and the Eleventh Battalion and the 11th Bn. 60th to the left (60th) Brigade. On the night December 10th/11th the Tenth Battalion took over from the 1st Bn. the Border Regt. in the sub-sector of the right group, and, on the same night, the Eleventh Battalion relieved the 1st Bn. Essex Regt. in the right sub-sector of the left group. The trenches of the Eleventh Battalion were those in which the Second Battalion had fought two months before. "This tour," says the Tenth Battalion Diary, "was one of the most trying ever experienced. The trenches occupied were still only battle trenches and were constantly falling in everywhere, and full of mud and water. It rained almost continuously, and on the night of the 11th there was a heavy fall of snow." It had been intended that front-line battalions should stay in the trenches for three days—but forty-eight hours was the utmost a battalion could stand. The Battalion (the Tenth) moved after relief to Guillemont. Such was the state of the men that the last stragglers did not reach camp until 5 a.m.

The trenches of the Eleventh Battalion were no better. One man died from exhaustion in the dug-out of the support company commander; and Captain Hollond, the commander of "A" (right front line) Company, stayed throughout the whole night of the relief endeavouring to extricate one of his men who had stuck in the mud of a front-line trench. No words could be too strong to describe the difficulties of that sector. The only communication trench was so deep in sticky mud that to venture into it was to invite the loss of one's boots. The track that ran beside it

* There were as yet no Labour Battalions.

up to the front line was so slippery that men constantly slid off it into the shell holes on either side. Even gum-boots were insufficient to protect the feet. The cold was intense: the wind and sleet blew bitterly; and the enemy had the range of the track accurately registered by his field guns. Two tours of these trenches saw the approach of Christmas. The Light Division was relieved by the 17th Division and gladly made its way back to Corbie. The enemy had evidently found the conditions equally trying for, with the exception of a few shells to catch relief and ration parties, hardly a shot was fired. The Twelfth Battalion, when its turn came, followed the 6th Bn. Oxfordshire and Bucks into the trenches of the Eleventh Battalion. The Thirteenth Battalion left Puchevillers on December 13th en route for the Lys. A week previously Lieut.-Colonel F. S. W. Savage Armstrong, D.S.O., 2nd/7th Bn. Essex Regt. (T.F.), had assumed command of the Battalion. The Sixteenth Battalion was still in the line at Ypres.

The Fifth and Sixth (Special Reserve) Battalions, still under the command of Lieut.-Colonel F. G. Talbot, D.S.O., and Lieut.-Colonel E. A. F. Dawson, had settled down on the Island of Sheppey in 1914 and there remained; the Fifth at Minster-on-Sea, under the shadow of Shurland Abbey (widely renowned in the *Ingoldsby Legends*), and the Sixth in and around Shurland Hall at Eastchurch. The possibility of invasion via the Thames Estuary was sufficiently seriously regarded by the authorities for sentry groups to be ordered out along the Sheppey cliffs; and these were provided by the two battalions. In addition detachments were maintained at selected tactical points, and there was a scheme of defence under which the whole Brigade (completed by the 5th and 6th Bns. of the 60th) would concentrate and dispute a landing. The battalion commanders occasionally practised the fluctuating troops under their command in carrying out this scheme, and a touch of the reality of war was given by the not infrequent Zeppelin and aeroplane alerts. But the serious work of both battalions was the training and despatch of reinforcements to the front. In addition to the permanent battalion staff, special instructors were obtained from those officers and N.C.O.'s of the regular battalions who chanced to be in England recovering from wounds and had, therefore, recent and first-hand experience of the conditions at the front. As the war progressed and the service (Reserve) battalions (Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Seventeenth) became ciphers in the great Training Reserve, and the Rifle Depôt was opened at Havre, the Fifth and Sixth Battalions became the home of all Riflemen in England whether from the regular or service battalions; and additional instructors were thenceforward taken indiscriminately from either, solely on the test of efficiency. The camp grew

in size and comfort. A small theatre sprang up at Minster, largely under the auspices of Major G. B. Byrne, the second-in-command of the Fifth Battalion. The wet and dry canteens and the men's institutions were worthy of any permanent barracks. The messing arrangements and provision of kit and rations in the Fifth Battalion, genially presided over by Captain F. J. Walter, the Quartermaster, could hardly have been bettered. Indeed, both officers and men in their dug-outs, or in trenches falling away into muddy pools, thought often and longingly of the reserve battalions—with the all pervading cleanliness and good order, the excellent meals, the Battalion Sports, and Corporal Bland's concerts and theatrical entertainments.

Christmas Day 1914 had been a truce ; and there were efforts to renew it in 1915. Christmas 1916, however, passed in the line like any other day. The enemy, dispirited and alarmed at the inroads made by the battle of the Somme, was in no mood for a fraternization that might still further have undermined the moral of his troops. For it cannot be denied that the British offensive had shaken that moral severely. The British, on the other hand, had no feeling but disfavour for the nation whose submarine atrocities had been so boastfully carried out. The First Battalion spent the day in support at Priez Farm on the Rancourt-Combles road. "It was only remarkable for the extra amount of work done improving the very bad accommodation there ; and the blowing up of one of our bomb stores by a German shell." The Second Battalion, luckier, was still in rest at Warlus. "Christmas Day Celebrations were carried out." But the First Battalion was not to be done out of its Christmas fare. The official celebration of Christmas took place at Chipilly on January 7th during a spell in reserve ; and a wonderful show the men appear to have made. They decorated their huts with branches of fir trees, and cotton-wool mottoes and emblems worked on Army blankets, one of which—a heavy howitzer with the motto "Peace on Earth, good will to men"—deserves to be remembered. "An excellent meal was served at night, and all the good old customs were adhered to."

The Third Battalion spent the day at Mazingarbe, where the men had a battalion dinner in the brewery. Christmas Day found the Seventh Battalion still in the trenches in F Sector in which it had relieved the Eighth Battalion on the 22nd. "A" and "B" Companies accordingly kept Christmas on the 29th, and "C" and "D" on the 30th. The dinners were worth the short delay, for Captain Coombes, the Quartermaster, as long before as September, had bought six pigs and two hundred fowls which, confined in wire coops, he had somehow smuggled from place to place

THE PART PLAYED BY THE REGIMENT IN THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

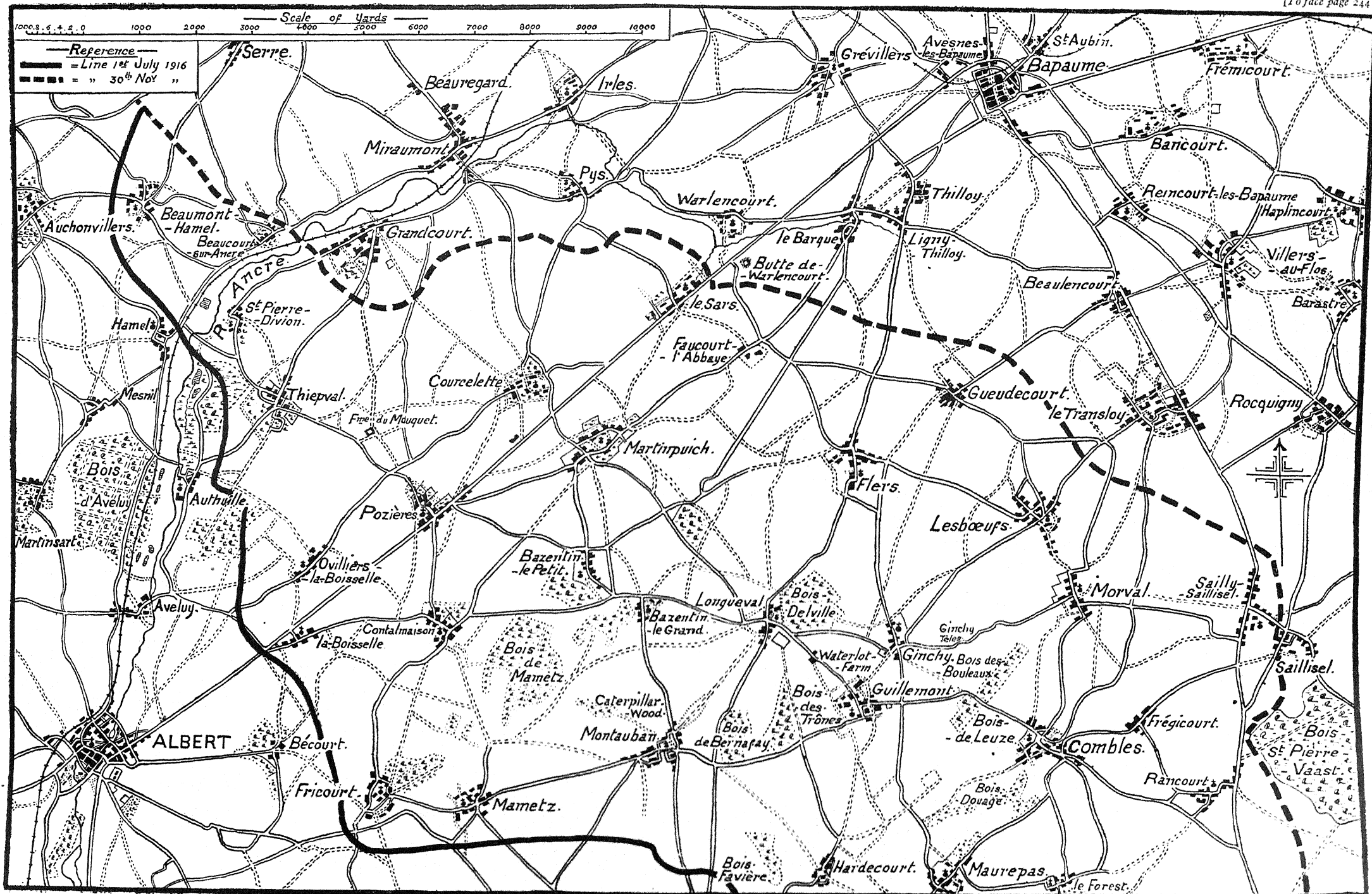
JULY–NOVEMBER, 1916.

Battalion.	Locality.	From.	To.	How Employed.
1st	Just north of Beaumont Hamel	1st July	2nd July	Initial attack. Reached objective, but finally bombed out.
2nd	West of Ovillers-La-Boisselle	1st July	—	In reserve, not employed.
13th	Vicinity of Albert	1st July	—	In reserve.
13th	South-east of Ovillers-La-Boisselle	7th July	10th July	Attack on 10th July. 200 prisoners taken.
10th, 11th, 12th	South-east of Hebuterne . .	End of July	16th Aug.	In trenches.
7th, 8th, 9th	Delville Wood area	11th Aug.	—	In reserve.
3rd	Just west of Guillemont . .	12th Aug.	14th Aug.	In reserve.
8th	North of Longueval	14th Aug.	—	Prepared trenches for attack on 18th August.
7th (and B Coy. 8th)	Longueval	18th Aug.	19th Aug.	Attack on Wood Lane Trench, partially successful.
3rd	Just north of Guillemont . .	18th Aug.	22nd Aug.	Captured Guillemont Station and two lines of trenches with 100 prisoners on 18th August.
D Coy., 3rd	Just north of Guillemont . .	21st Aug.	22nd Aug.	Attack; partially successful initially, but gains evacuated at nightfall.
9th	Delville Wood	22nd Aug.	—	Assisted advance of 9th Bn. K.R.R.C.
10th, 11th 12th	West of Guillemont	22nd Aug.	31st Aug.	In trenches.
3rd	Longueval	1st Sept.	2nd Sept.	Retook Orchard Trench on 1st September.
10th, 11th	Guillemont and just south . .	3rd Sept.	5th Sept.	Very successful attack on 3rd September. Advance of a mile. 11th Bn. took 150 prisoners.
12th	Just east of Guillemont . . .	3rd Sept.	6th Sept.	Took over from Irish after attack.
16th	North-west of St. Pierre Divion	3rd Sept.	—	Unsuccessful attack.
8th	Between Delville Wood and Ginchy	12th Sept.	17th Sept.	} Very successful attack and big advance to between Flers and Lesbœufs on 15th September.
7th, 9th	" " " "	14th Sept.	16th Sept.	
10th, 11th	Near Lesbœufs	16th Sept.	—	Unsuccessful attack on 16th September.
Fighting patrol, 12th	North of the Quadrilateral . .	18th Sept.	20th Sept.	Assisted attack of 6th Division.
12th	South-east of Morval	26th Sept.	27th Sept.	Ground gained and touch established with French on right.
10th, 11th	South of Guillemont	26th Sept.	27th Sept.	In reserve, handed over to French on 27th September.
10th, 11th, 12th	Gueudecourt sector	1st Oct.	—	In reserve.
12th, and working parties 11th	South-east of Gueudecourt . .	7th Oct.	8th Oct.	Captured Rainbow and Cloudy Trenches on 7th October.
1st	East of Lesbœufs	17th Oct.	19th Oct.	Night attack on 18th October.
2nd	East of Lesbœufs	19th Oct.	—	In trenches.
16th	River Ancre south of St. Pierre Divion	21st Oct.	23rd Oct.	Took part in successful attack on 21st October.
1st, 2nd	East of Lesbœufs	23rd Oct.	24th Oct.	Attack, but not much progress.
16th	South of St. Pierre Divion . .	28th Oct.	29th Oct.	In front line trenches.
16th	Thiepval	13th Nov.	—	In reserve for attack, but not employed.
13th	South-east of Beaumont-Hamel—Beaucourt	14th Nov.	15th Nov.	Successful attack on 14th November.

THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME AND ANCRE.

1st July-30th November, 1916.

[To face page 244]



GENERAL MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE MOVEMENTS OF ALL BATTALIONS OF THE REGIMENT ENGAGED IN THE OPERATIONS.

in the battalion transport. The Eighth Battalion was in support at Rivière on the 25th. The Ninth Battalion, like the Seventh, spent Christmas Day in the trenches. The three battalions of the 20th Division arrived in the Corbie area on Christmas Eve. The Tenth and Eleventh Battalions were billeted in Corbie, the Twelfth at Mericourt-l'Abbé. A few officers were sent off on forty-eight hours' leave to Paris that night and arrived on Christmas morning. Of these at least two, completely tired out by the latest tour in the trenches, spent the whole day sound asleep in their hotel, and ate their Christmas dinner in the early hours of Boxing Day. The Thirteenth Battalion, en route for the line at Neuve-Chapelle, was at Croix Barbée. The Sixteenth Battalion, having spent four days in the line at Ypres, was relieved on Christmas morning by the 17th Bn. Notts. and Derby Regt. and became support battalion of the 117th Brigade. During its tour it sent out a number of special patrols which carried out their work in a manner that earned warm praise from the Brigadier who expressed himself "very pleased with the excellent patrol reports" and directed that his appreciation should be conveyed "to those concerned, especially the N.C.O.s who conducted these parties."

On the last day of the year the battalions were in much the same positions. The First was back in the line, the Second on its way to the line at Frégicourt, the Third at Loos, the Fourth at Salonika, the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth at Arras, the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth preparing to move forward to the Combles area. The Thirteenth Battalion had gone into the line at Neuve-Chapelle and had been heavily bombarded. The trenches and wire here were bad. The Sixteenth Battalion wound up the year in the front line again. Every one confidently looked forward to winning the war early in the coming year—an excellent spirit in which to begin it. Had they realized the grimness of the struggle that was still before them they would have faced the future less lightheartedly but with no less determination.

END OF VOLUME I.

